

RAVENA GURON

MONDAYS
ARE
MURDER

USBORNE

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1

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

ReadingZone

ReadingZone

MONDAY

ReadingZone

ReadingZone

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, and the town my parents moved us out of a year ago because Mum couldn't stand to stay.

And now I'm back for a week, dumped on my Uncle Dara while my parents are 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 then I 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 told me she'd already sorted it out 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, the tiniest acknowledgement that she would return to Longrove too. But briefly. After I had been there all alone, for a week.

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 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.

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 clicked almost immediately when I showed up at school last year, alone and miserable, was the fact that we've both got the same sort of 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 homemade fudge you said your uncle was 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.

ReadingZone

3

The bus rolls to a stop on the main 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. Besides the fact 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 start walking 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 road, straight into a residential area – I'm not sure I have the core strength needed to lift my suitcase if it comes down to it, so I've got to be careful. As I walk away from the high street, the back roads get 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.

On my way, 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 let me make when I was six and then never let me undo. Sure, she won't trust me to stay home alone for a week while she swans off to France, but she absolutely will maintain 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 we left town last year, running away from our memories of Aunt Sandra. 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 on 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 always insisted on 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 constantly – 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 constantly on to keep her company.

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

The walls are closing in on me, 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 back 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 around 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 then my nose would fall off. I told her that wasn't possible, and 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. “Great to know how much you were looking forward to seeing me. Where’s 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 indeed 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 around 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 would 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 and unruly tangled messes of hair. Except Nikki is tall and athletic

and I'm short 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 eventually respond to any messages I send, her replies are clipped. If I didn't know her as well as I do, I'd have thought she simply 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 us in person, 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 at the moment 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 for me?" 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 café, 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 out – 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, for a visit, 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 about town... Go to the café, 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 are not 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 handmade 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 start lugging 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 dart board 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. He probably would have warned me if I was going to be sleeping on the floor in here 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 just 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 that Uncle Dara keeps towels and years-old wrapping paper in.

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,

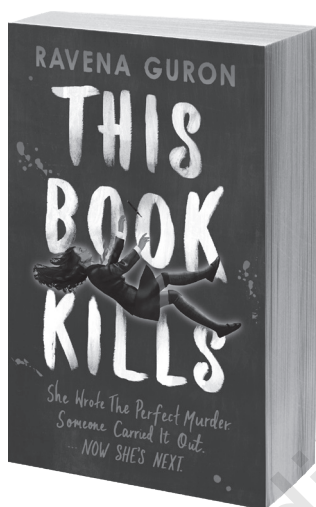
*Get ready for the next week, because we're
going to play a game. Can you beat me and
figure out my identity before the week is up?
The stakes will just keep getting higher –
there's going to be...*

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.

ReadingZone

MURDER, MYSTERY AND MIND-BLOWING TWISTS...



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Someone carried it out.

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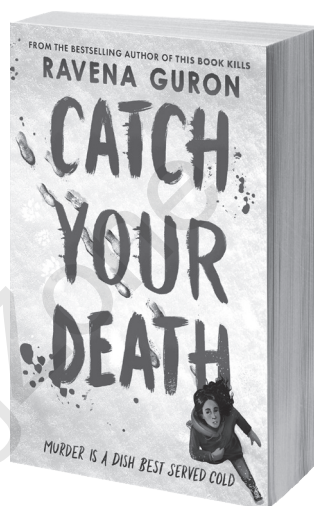
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“Gripping.” *The i*

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RAVENA GURON



A born and bred Londoner, Ravena writes MG and YA, usually featuring anti-heroines or snarky narrators. Growing up she 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. Ravena is a lawyer with a degree in biochemistry, and hopes to use the knowledge gained from her experiences to plot the perfect murder (for a book, 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