

# Manic Monday

By Josie Lane

## Log – first two days from memory

### Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> March 11 p.m. The night before

Finished watching repeat of *Stranger Things* on Netflix in my room. Went to the kitchen. Housemates Essie and Will were getting it on - she was sitting on his lap with her arms around his neck and giggling. They tried to be cool about it when I walked in. I grinned as I quickly poured a large glass of milk to give them some room. Will would have appreciated it though 'cos he's my best mate.

He called out as I was leaving. "Kian – did you get your phone screen fixed?"

"Yeah, picked it up this afternoon. Thanks for the recommendation - the shop did a good repair. That lady was a bit strange."

"Oh really? Didn't pay much notice to her."

I shrugged my shoulders and left.

Upstairs, Dan was holed up in his room on the PlayStation shouting obscenities at his party members. My fifth and final housemate, Lucy, knocked on my door around 11.30 p.m. She held up a tray of homemade chocolate cupcakes. Smelled buttery and fresh.

"Made these this afternoon."

"You angel. Can I save one for breakfast? Got to be up early to finish my assignment."

"Sure. I'll leave some in the cake tin – help yourself. Night, Kian."

"See you." I held her gaze for an extra second. I couldn't help myself. There was so much I loved about her. It wasn't her honey-coloured hair, dewy skin and hazel eyes alone. Lucy had this incredible nature – kind and always thinking of others. She didn't know how I really felt.

Set my phone alarm for 7 a.m. as it was going to be a long day. Little did I know *how* long.

### Monday 18<sup>th</sup> March 7 a.m. When it happened

Had to hit snooze twice on my mobile. It takes forever to wake me up. It was pretty bright in my bedroom. Sunlight was pouring in between cracks of the wooden blinds. I didn't bother opening them until I had a shower – a long one as it's the only way to clear my fuzzy head. Everyone was still in bed, but silence always helps me gather my thoughts. I've got to keep my scores up to pass my second year in Animation.

In the kitchen, I put two teaspoons of instant Americano into the mug. Rocket fuel, I know. But it works. I looked around for Lucy's cupcakes but couldn't find them. Odd.

Abi (who was in our halls last year but doesn't live with us) walked into the kitchen, clutching her phone. She was wearing an oversized Isle of Wight Festival t-shirt. I recognised it straightaway as belonging to Will. I stared at her. I mean most lads would 'cos she's fit, but it was like some kind of crazy déjà-vu.

*I was reliving the same scene.*

Except in that instance, I had been looking for two paracetamols from Lucy's cupboard to numb the effects of a hangover. Abi had also strolled into the kitchen without a care in the world.

"You've just spent the night with Will, and he's begged you not to tell Ellie?" I said in my current scenario.

She looked incredulous. "How did you know—"

"What day is it?"

"Er, Monday."

"No, the actual date."

"18<sup>th</sup> I think."

I snatched her mobile from her hand.

"What the hell, Kian?"

I glanced at the date on her phone. Sure enough, she was correct. "Fuck. This can't be right."

Abi protested. "You're scaring me."

A second later, Will walked in rubbing his eyes. I predicted he was going to lean against the door frame. He did. "What's going on Abi?"

"Kian is acting all weird. Saying strange shit."

He froze when he looked across and saw me. "Look mate, I know this looks bad – me and Abi...It just happened."

"You're also about to ask me not to tell Ellie."

I knew she had gone home for a long weekend.

"Yeah. It's kind of awkward."

"I don't care," I said. I thrust the phone in front of his face. "Look at this and tell me something weird is going on with the date."

"It says Monday 18th."

"But it isn't. It should say Monday 25<sup>th</sup>!"

"You've lost me," he said.

"Last night – when it was Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> – you and Ellie were here in the kitchen, all over each other."

Abi cut in sourly. "Will?"

"Kian – I don't know what you're talking about. I was with Abi. Ellie's away."

"Something's not right," I said. I ran upstairs to my room and checked my laptop. It clearly showed the same date: Monday 18<sup>th</sup>. I looked through my texts. The last one received was on Sunday 17<sup>th</sup>. I slumped on my bed and thoughts raced around my head. Maybe I had dreamt the events from yesterday?

I stayed in my room for the rest of the day and fell asleep at some point. I heard a knock on my door around 7 p.m. I ignored it at first but gave in when I heard Lucy begging me to let her in.

"Are you OK, Kian? Will says you freaked out this morning. Something about the wrong week."

I put my trust in Lucy. Told her everything. She nodded and listened.

"I guess I would feel like I was going crazy too," she said. "You're under a lot of stress and anxious about your studies."

"Maybe. At least I now have an extra week to finish my assignment."

She tapped my arm playfully. "That's a bonus then!"

"Are you sure you didn't bake yesterday?"

"No, but I'll make some brownies tomorrow. How about that?"

"Perfect."

I set the alarm for 7 a.m. again.

### **Monday 18<sup>th</sup> March 7 a.m. Today**

I looked at my mobile when I woke up. No change.

My mind and body seemed to separate themselves. Looking on the outside and in. No control over what was happening. I felt sick. I opened the blinds and a window. Birdsong and fresh air entered the room – tangible and real. I took a deep breath. I know I didn't imagine yesterday, in lost or real time. They weren't dreams. I paced up and down wondering what I was going to do. I waited on the landing. Sure enough, Abi padded through Will's doorway.

"Hi, Kian," she said casually.

I barely acknowledged her and waited until she reached the bottom of the stairs. I sneaked into Will's room.

"Are you awake?"

"What?" Will muttered.

I strode across the room and pulled up his blinds. "I need your help."

"Shit, Kian. What's going on?" Will sat up and looked around. He pointed to the moulded space next to him. "Ah mate, I can explain about Abi—"

"I need you to think about anything which was out of the ordinary in the past week."

"Like what?"

"Something inexplicable. What about an eclipse or small earthquake?"

"It's Bournemouth. No fault lines here. Chances of a tsunami are rare as we're about two miles away from the coast and above sea level."

"There's got to be something."

"You're sounding peculiar."

"That's because it is," I stressed.

Abi walked back in with a plate of toast and looked at us. "What's going on?"

I ignored her and walked out.

I heard Will leap out of his bed and follow me into my room. "Please don't say anything to Ellie."

I turned around and rolled my eyes. "Not interested in your complicated love life. I've got other things to worry about."

"You seem stressed. It was the same last year when you had your exams."

"Because somehow I've gone back a week in time, and I don't know why."

I wasn't surprised to see Will gawping at me. I shook my head in disbelief at my set of circumstances. But deep down I was terrified.

"Maybe you should ring the GP," he suggested.

"Yeah," I choked.

"I'm going to get Lucy."

I slumped onto the edge of the bed and slipped my head between my knees. Thought I was going to faint.

Lucy joined me. "Hey, Kian. What's up?"

"You won't believe me if I tell you."

"C'mon, start from the beginning."

I recounted my version of events. Again.

"I can see why you're feeling really anxious."

I sighed. "You don't believe me."

"I believe you're scared, and I know you pretty well enough to declare you aren't a liar."

"Maybe Will is right. Perhaps I should call the GP."

This time, Lucy took my hand and dropped her head to my shoulder. Her newly washed hair smelled of apples. I wanted to wrap my arms around her but resisted. Couldn't risk spoiling our friendship too.

I made an appointment to speak to a GP who called me back before lunchtime. I told him about my stress, omitting the bit about jumping back in time, of course. He was really understanding. Lucy offered to pick up the prescription and brought it back late afternoon.

"The doctor said it would take about two weeks to kick in," I said.

"Give it a chance. I'm here whenever you need me. You look really tired. Try and get some rest."

After she left, I stared in the mirror. Sure enough, there were grey smudges under my brown eyes. My pale complexion looked stark against my black hair.

I was exhausted and slept the rest of the day, waking up briefly to set the alarm once more.

### **Monday 18<sup>th</sup> March 7 a.m. No change**

I put the phone back to factory settings and re-installed everything.

### **Monday 18<sup>th</sup> March 7 a.m. No change**

I've started a tally of Mondays. I'm hoping the pills will be working in a fortnight. Something has to change. Surely...

### **Monday 18<sup>th</sup> March 7 a.m. Today**

#### #### IIII

The meds have numbed the edges of my fears, but they haven't improved my situation. Total despair. Chucked my phone against the wall. I heard it crack. I picked it up and spotted the chipped corner of the frame. Shit. I've only just had it repaired. A thought entered my head. I hadn't considered it until now.

I ran down the corridor and burst into Will's room, flicking on his light. I didn't bother with the blinds. "Will, wake up!"

"What the fuck?" Abi yelled.

"What's going on, Kian?" he mumbled.

"I know there's got to be a connection with the phone shop."

Will look confused. "What has?" He propped himself up against the headboard next to Abi. His cheeks flushed. "About Abi—"

"Do you remember my screen got smashed last Monday in the kitchen when I returned from lectures in the afternoon?"

"Yeah, sure," Will said vaguely.

I continued. "I left it on the side. Half an hour later, I found it on the floor. It must have slipped off. You had just returned from your long weekend away and recommended that repair shop in town. I took it in on Tuesday. The woman said it would be ready the next day, but when I went back the shop was shut. A 'Closed' sign was up and a note stuck to the door to say it was closed due to sickness and to collect repairs on Sunday. I thought that was unusual because they wouldn't normally open for business on that day. I didn't question it since I was relieved to get my mobile back. I wished I had gone and bought another phone instead. Things could have been so different..."

Will scratched his head, "I'm sorry mate, but I'm not sure how I can help."

"Don't worry. I know what I need to do."

I caught the bus and headed into town. In my haste, I arrived an hour before the shop was due to open. I grabbed a take-away latte and took a stroll along the pier to clear my head, blurry from the anxiety tablet. I made a decision there and then to ditch them.

The navy sea was dead calm, just a few gentle breaks every so often. A seagull landed on the wooden railing and looked straight at me as if it was trying to read my thoughts. A black and beady eye connected with my own. It began to squawk, stabbing its head in my direction. A small gust of wind lifted its wings, and the bird hovered over my head. I shooed it away, but it pincered my finger with its beak.

"Fucker," I shouted. I clipped its body with my hand. It finally retreated and flew off, screaming into the distance.

### **9.15 a.m.**

With fifteen minutes to go before opening time, I returned to the shop and shifted my weight impatiently from one leg to the other. At 9.30 a.m. there wasn't a visible presence of anyone. I waited five more minutes and banged on the door. No answer. I cupped my face and peered inside. Nothing to see. I thumped harder the second time. I wasn't going to leave without getting answers. Eventually, a strip light powered up in the rear of the shop.

A figure seemed to drift towards the door. I couldn't see the person's feet. Creepy-like. A face appeared. Nearly jumped out of my skin. It was the woman that served me the first time. Her eyes glinted in the thin light.

"Open up," I said, lowering my voice an octave. No way was I leaving without answers. The lady was rooted to the spot, staring.

"I'll call the police," I threatened.

She switched on another light, unbolted the lock and let me in. Followed her and kept my distance as she snaked her way around to the other side of the counter.

She was wearing some rank, cloying perfume, like rotten flowers. Her jet-black hair had been scraped back into a ponytail. I studied her face properly. It was hard to work out her age under the milky glow of the ceiling light. Death warmed up. Her skin was waxy and smooth with no wrinkles, but her eyes were lined and hooded. She tipped her head mockingly and her hooped, brassy earrings jangled. She spoke in a gravelly voice. "What do you want?"

I flashed my phone at her. "You repaired this last week. It had a cracked screen."

She sighed. "So, what's your problem? It's fixed, isn't it?"

I hesitated. What the hell could I say? She started picking nonchalantly at a loose piece of skin on her index finger, while she waited for me to speak. I noticed she had a bird's eye tattooed on the top of each hand. The inked charcoal shade matched the colour of her irises. A cold feeling washed over me.

"You put a curse on it."

She laughed. It was patronising and ridiculing.

"Remove whatever you did to it."

She wagged a crooked finger. "I can't stop it. Only you can. Ask your friend – he knows."

"Who?"

"The one who told you to come here."

Will.

She pinched my forearm. "You can't throw your phone away either. It won't make a difference."

I slapped her hand away. "Don't touch me, you witch."

I staggered out of the shop. Total disbelief. I caught the bus thinking about the million questions to ask my so-called best mate. It also dawned on me that Will must have sabotaged my mobile when I left it in the kitchen. I texted him to say I visited the shop and knew he had deliberately damaged my phone. I had another worrying thought. What the hell did she mean when she said I couldn't get rid of my mobile?

#### 10.17 a.m.

I bolted through the front door when I got home, panting after running from the bus-stop.

Lucy emerged from the kitchen. "What's going on, Kian?"

"Have you seen Will?"

"He left a short while ago. Had a holdall with him and asked Dan to give him a lift."

"Did he say where he was going?"

"No, sorry."

"What's this about?" Lucy asked.

I didn't have the time or energy to tell her. Not today. I charged upstairs, two steps at a time. I turned Will's door handle. It was locked. Kicked the door in and ignored Lucy's protests from the bottom of the stairs. I rummaged through every drawer and inside his wardrobe. He had packed some clothing. Done a runner. Prick. I texted Dan to tell me where he had dropped off Will.

Lucy appeared. Her face fell when she saw the mess. "Have you and Will fallen out?"

I pointed to my phone. "He's the one, Lucy. He caused this."

She crumpled her forehead. "I don't know what's going on with you guys, but this situation sounds serious. Maybe you should contact his parents, or the police—"

"No one will believe me. I'm sorry Lucy. I need to go to my room to think."

Dan texted me: Dropped Will to station.

My heart sank. Will's parents lived in Nottingham – if that was where he was headed. I wouldn't be able to make it on time. I had a thought. Let the day reset and grab Will first thing.

#### 4.23 p.m.

Must have fallen asleep again. So tired all of the time. Someone was shaking me.

"Kian...wake up."

I recognised the voice, and my eyes sprang open. Impulsively, I grabbed the front of Will's green hoodie. We crashed to the floor and wrestled for a couple of minutes. Managed to pin his arms with my knees and screamed into his face, "What did you do?"

"I'm sorry, I'm so sorry. Hear me out – please mate."

"I'm not your fucking mate. You've got a lot of explaining to do."

Will nodded. I released him. He sat upright, shuffled across to my desk and leaned against it for support.

"I went to the phone shop about two weeks' ago to get a new screen. There was this crazy looking woman serving—"

"The witch with the evil bird-eye tattoos."

"Yeah. You know how I like to talk. I said something about needing to fix the phone because I had one of the best weekends of my life. The one where I went on that paintball and go-karting trip near Bristol with some guys from the hockey team. I wanted to see the photos."

He paused as if he was expecting me to say something. I didn't.

"She asked me if I wanted to relive that experience. I joked and said: 'Why the hell not?' The witch locked the shop door and told me to follow her around the back with my mobile. I entered a tiny room with row upon row of small amber jars from the ceiling to the floor. While she was repairing my phone, I examined the bottles. They were filled with liquid and labelled in some ancient language, like Latin or something similar. She picked out three or four of the jars. They had rubber pipettes, and she squeezed a few drops from each into a marble pestle bowl on a small folding table. But this is where it gets sinister."

I leaned towards him.

"She pulled down this heavy red book, the size of a photo album from another shelf. It looked ancient, covered in gold italic inscriptions around the picture of a bird's eye. She opened it and rested my phone on one of the pages. She recited some verses as she stirred the solution. You're going to think, there was puff of smoke or something, but it was deadly silent. No dramatic music. I could only hear my ragged breathing because I was shitting myself by this point. And then she said it was done. I got the hell out of there."

"I remember that evening." I said. "You asked us all not to choose a horror movie when we had our film night with the others. You were unusually subdued. Go on."

"I woke up the next morning in the youth hostel with the rest of the lads. I couldn't believe what had happened. It was great to start off with. What was there not to like? Team games by day and beers at night. And sleeping with a gorgeous local girl." I rolled my eyes.

"But then I got sick of it and was going stir crazy."

"You – getting sick of sex? Don't make me laugh. How did you escape from it?"

Will paused a moment. "That's the bit I haven't told you yet."

"What do you mean?"

He chewed his bottom lip.

"Spit it out, Will."

"The witch told me the only way I could transfer the curse from me to someone else is for it to be removed from my phone to another person's mobile."

"So that's why you smashed mine and ensured I went back to her shop."

"I was desperate when I woke up in the youth hostel all over again. I drove back here and saw your phone lying on the kitchen worktop. I popped back to the shop before you visited and told her she had to pass the curse over to you. I left my phone with her. My day stopped resetting only when you finally left it in her possession. I wasn't thinking straight, but I thought you could handle it."

"Are you kidding me? Fuck's sake. I've been stuck in a revolving nightmare."

"I know, I'm sorry."

"Wait – so all I need to do is wreck someone else's phone to get out of this?"

Dan walked in. "Hey guys, is everything cool between you both?"

Will looked from Dan to me.

I shook my head and eyeballed Will. I knew what was going through his head. Not a chance.

"We're good, Dan," I said cheerfully.

"Lucy says you've had a massive row. Will's door looks pretty bad..."

"Just a misunderstanding. I deserved it," Will said sheepishly.

I couldn't argue with him.

Dan turned to leave. "Film night sometime this week then?"

"Sure," I said and gave him a thumbs up as he left the room.

"I've got an idea, Kian," Will said.

"I hope it's a good one. Time is running out. I can't face another day."

"Are those tools still in the bike shed?"

#### **10.47 p.m.**

Adrenaline was pumping through my veins as we mounted our bikes. Will didn't want to use his car in case someone spotted his registration. Our backpacks were packed tightly with selected tools taken from the bike shed, two tins of barbecue fuel, one bottle of nasty tasting own-label rum, some matches and two of Will's ski balaclavas.

Earlier in my bedroom, he had shared his plan. "We've got to stop this crazy bitch from doing it to anyone else."

"I'm listening."

"Who knows how many other people are wondering around Bournemouth caught in time loops, and wrecking other people's lives to escape the nightmare? We need to get to the source to break the link. It's that red book. We have to destroy it, along with all the other crap she's got in that room. At least run her out of town."

"So - breaking and entering?"

"And burning."

"Arson?"

Will stood up. "I'm not religious, but I know fire is the one thing that could purge this abomination. It's worth a shot."

"What if we get caught?"

"Better make sure we don't."

#### **11.06 p.m.**

We dumped our bikes behind some gravestones in the church that faced the rear entrance of the shop across the road. Will knew the location as it shared the same route to his favourite arcades. We slipped the balaclavas over our heads.

He pointed to the alarm box above the door and pulled out a pair of pliers from his backpack. I looked around to check the street was clear and looped both hands, taking his weight as he stood up. He snipped carefully through the wiring.

Will was the lookout for the next task and shielded me as I positioned a wrench at an angle above the rusty padlock. I knocked the end heavily with a small hammer. The lock cracked and snapped apart. Will stuffed it in his pocket. The wooden door cranked as I pulled it outwards, and he followed me inside.

#### **11.12 p.m.**

It was the smell that hit us first. The lingering waft of the witch's perfume mingled with rotten meat. Nearly puked. We were both retching under our balaclavas. Will shone his torch which highlighted a small corridor. He nudged me and pointed ahead. There were two black wooden panelled doors with flaking paint stood opposite each other. The main entrance to the shop was at the end. Will opened the door on the right and entered first.

#### **11.16 p.m.**

He found a light switch. Inside, there were plastic crates, stacked five deep and filled with mobile phones. Stuck to the front of each box were sheets with the bird-eye symbol stamped on every corner. Freakish. There had to be hundreds of phones. All cursed. Will grabbed a footstool from the corner and doused barbecue fuel along top of the boxes. I removed another bottle and laced the floor with flammable, colourless liquid.

#### **11.35 p.m.**

We entered the second room and discovered the origin of the putrefying stench. In the corner, was a skinned creature pinned to a cork board perched on the counter, leaning against a free patch of wall. I could tell it was a rat because the furry ears and grey waxy tail were still in tact.

Will wasn't joking when he said how high the shelves of bottles rose. I pointed at my mobile to signal the urgency. He climbed onto the counter and ran a trickle of more fuel along the top two rows. Couldn't see the red book he wished to destroy. It would be a pointless mission without finding it.

I crouched down onto my heels and rifled through a couple of cupboards underneath a counter. Filled with more bottles. Checked again. I nearly missed the grey canister tucked away at the back of the second unit. I prised the lid open but lost my balance and rolled backwards. The contents poured out, and I heard beads clattering across the floor. As I looked up, the witch was staring down at me, clasping the red book to her chest. She narrowed her eyes, peeled back her upper lip and produced an unearthly snarling sound. She lifted the tome above her head and then everything went dark.

#### **11.49 p.m.**

Someone was dragging me from under my arms. I was semi-conscious, and my head pounded. I started choking heavily in the smoke-filled air. I tried to get up, but my legs were limp.

"Stay with me, Kian. Almost there!" Will shouted.

He let go of me for a moment. I heard him kick the back door open. I pulled my head up and saw orange flames licking the ceiling of the corridor. The witch staggered out of the burning room, screeching as she clutched the scorched book with cracked and blistered hands. Pages were crumbling into ash. She slid over the loose beads, and crashed to the floor, near my feet. The remnants of the charred book were engulfed by the encroaching flames. She tried to shuffle forwards on her front and clawed at my leg with her melting fingers.

"Get the fuck off!" I screamed and kicked her in the head. She snapped to the side and her twisted features were blanked out by the thick, black acrid smoke.

Will dragged me onto the pavement and ran back to the exit. He pulled out the bottle of rum and lobbed it inside. He slammed the door and forced it shut by wedging the wrench underneath the base. He took me back to the graveyard in a fireman's lift, and the last thing I remembered hearing was a rumble followed by an atomic explosion.

#### **Awake**

My alarm beeped. I slowly emerged from a deep sleep. Someone turned it off and leaned over me. I could smell a trace of apples.

"Hey, Lucy."

"Hey, you."

"Your alarm was ringing for ages."

"I know."

If my day hadn't reset, at least I could spend it forever, here with Lucy.

"What's the date?"

"Monday."

I groaned. But something occurred to me. Lucy didn't feature in my bedroom in any of my mornings. "What's the actual date?"

"25<sup>th</sup> March."

I grabbed the phone to be sure. She was right. I scrolled through checking the local news reports from the previous week. A headline grabbed my attention: *Unidentified body discovered in burned down mobile phone shop.*

"What's wrong, Kian?"

“Nothing. It’s all good.” I took her hand without realising I had probably over-stepped the parameters of our friendship. “Sorry, shouldn’t have done that.” I let go.

She slipped her hand around mine instead. “Don’t be sorry,” and kissed me, softly on the lips. New beginnings.

Will, Ellie and Dan crashed into the room. Will was holding Ellie’s hand. He grinned mischievously when he saw Lucy in my arms.

“A perfect coupling!” Will announced.

“By the way guys,” Dan said. “My phone case is broken. Does anyone know a repair shop?”