



LUCY MOHAN

People often joke about Lucy being an eternal student but it's not too far from the truth. She's spent over twenty-five years of her life in education (so far ...) either studying subjects like media and creative writing, or teaching media and English in secondary schools.

She lives and breathes horror and fantasy and wrote her first stories as a teenager, always searching for new and gruesome ways to terrify her friends. It was inevitable, therefore, that Lucy would become a storyteller of things that scare her.

About *The Sixes and Seven*

One chosen to save the world: one chosen to end it.

When sixteen-year-old Faye learns of a looming apocalypse, she wonders if it's such a bad thing. With her mum always away and after the death of her best friend, Faye feels she has nothing left. But it isn't long before she begins to question everything she thought she knew about the world and the people in it.

Faye and a group of mismatched teens are taken to Glastonbury where they discover a prophecy linking them to the apocalypse. But, when they all become targets of the demon, Lix, Faye is left with one burning question: is the world worth saving?

lucy_mohan@outlook.com
@_L_MO

THE SIXES AND SEVENS

Chapter One

The frost has made everything cold and bitter tonight, including my mood.

I work hard at my expression – or lack of one. Mum taught me that: how to show nothing on your face, even when your mind is spinning.

Beanie's footsteps tap endlessly behind me as she paces the pavement. I stare ahead, my back to her.

The rest of the street is empty except for one man and his sign on a stick. 'Beware,' he shouts. 'The end of the world is nigh.'

I roll my eyes. He's preaching to the wrong girl. If the end of the world is coming, bring it on. This planet could use a makeover.

'Faye, I said I'm sorry.' Beanie's footsteps stop behind me but I don't turn around. She sighs – loud, so I can hear.

The man ventures close enough that I'm able to make out words on his placard: some bullshit about a pale horse and Death. With a capital D.

I shiver.

'Faye!' Beanie yells.

I turn around – my lips squashed together – but I don't expect what I see. Mascara tears map their way down Beanie's face and, for a second, I almost drop my mask.

'You just don't get it,' she says and stares at me with that look. The look that says I don't understand her. That I never will. Despite the fact we've been inseparable for the last ten years. Despite the fact that she shares *every* little detail of her life with me; even when images I'd rather erase permanently scorch themselves into my frontal lobe *for ever*.

And yet, I still *don't get it*.

'I have to go home,' she says.

I don't say anything.

Beanie shuffles from foot to foot, biting her nails down to the skin. 'You should go too?'

I sit on a street bench behind me, folding then unfolding my arms. She promised she'd come to this gig weeks ago. And now, as usual, she's backing out.

That's why I'm mad, but I have no idea why she's crying about it.

'Faye, please. Don't be angry.' She wraps her yellow scarf around her neck. 'My parents are waiting up and it's late and we're underage – we won't get in and –' She pauses, wiping her cheek, 'we have school tomorrow and mocks after Christmas.' Her face crumples.

'Seriously ... school?' I roll my eyes and clench my fists. It's like all she thinks about.

No one at school cares about us. They don't even know we exist. But I can imagine her parents nagging, wanting her to get good results. And Beanie, being Beanie, won't want to disappoint them.

It's important, Faye,' she whispers. 'Come with me.'

'I'm fine,' I say through gritted teeth.

She probably doesn't want to leave me here alone at night – and maybe she shouldn't be walking home on her own this late either – but I'm too mad at her to worry about that.

'Now isn't the time for one of your moods, Faye. God!' She throws her hands up in the air. 'I'm going.'

But she isn't moving: just staring.

She's biting her lip so hard it goes white, cracks; she wipes away a drop of blood with the back of her hand. We've argued before. We've argued about this exact thing before. But she's never got this upset. I don't actually know if I've ever seen her this upset.

I probably should say something. Should I feel bad that I don't want to?

Beanie pushes her hands under her armpits and breathes out. A puff of frosty air hides her face. 'Faye?'

'Yeah?'

'Do you want to say goodnight or something?'

'Night,' I say, but my eyes focus on the frost sticking between the cracks in the pavement.

'We can go out another time. We have that other gig in January,' she says, trying to sound upbeat. She doesn't.

'Sure,' I say.

'I'm leaving. I mean it.' She turns her body slightly.

'I'm not stopping you.' My insides twist. I hate the way that sounded. But I can't take it back now.

'You can be such a –' She throws her hands up in frustration, her voice turning from optimistic to irritated to angry in seconds.

I tend to do that to people.

She's sucking in her lips and I think she's about to start crying again. God, what is wrong with her?

'Goodnight, Beanie.' I'm forcing a smile. 'Say hi to your parents for me.'

Beanie groans and turns away. Her parents hate me. Beanie says it's not me they hate. But what else is there?

'Goodnight.' She says it to the night air, to the rest of the world. Not to me.

I look at the back of her red hair snuggled in that yellow scarf. I wonder what her face is saying now. Is it still crying? Scrunched up? Disappointed?

I don't see why I should care. She doesn't seem to care about my feelings. Just because I don't wear them on my face every day doesn't mean I don't have them.

I guess she doesn't get me either.

Beanie walks away but stops at the corner, under an orange streetlight. It makes her hair flicker like fire. Just before she turns out of view, she looks over her shoulder at me. Her eyes widening, her forehead creasing.

My stomach knots. I open my mouth to say something – so I don't leave it like this – but I'm not good with words, never have been. I didn't mean to be such a bitch.

A cloud of breath surrounds Beanie's head, like she's speaking or sighing. She's too far away to tell which. I hold her stare for a second. Then look at the floor.

When I glance back up, she's gone.

*

I sit there for a few minutes contemplating whether to go to the gig alone. I should – that’s what Beanie thinks I’m doing – but, without her, it won’t be much fun. And she’s right, I won’t get in. Beanie looks older and if I have any chance of getting past security it would be with her.

There’s nothing left to do but go home.

Home, what a joke.

My stomach grumbles so I stop at the corner shop at the end of my street. The closed sign hangs lopsided in the window, surrounded by a piece of scrawny tinsel. It’s usually open until nine o’clock. I wonder if it’s later than I realise but, when I check my phone, it’s only just gone eight.

Ice has its grip on almost everything tonight, even the car windscreens are glittering alongside the Christmas lights. I blow hot air into my palms and rub my cheeks but the heat is lost before I touch my skin. A gust of icy wind pushes me from behind and, for a second, I think I hear someone call my name. It sounds far away, like a hiss. I glance behind me – maybe Beanie came back – but there’s no one there.

I pull my leather jacket across myself and quicken my pace. It used to be my dad’s so it wraps around me easily. I feel a little warmer which could be due to the jacket but it’s more likely from the thought of him wearing it: before I was born, before we moved here, before he died and left me alone with Mum.

The silhouette of my house juts up into the dark sky, its black windows reminding me of the emptiness inside. I walk up my path, kicking weeds that even the frost can’t kill. At least Beanie has a bright, warm home to go to; parents who care (even if sometimes too much); an annoying brother; a hot dinner; a warm bed.

The smell of damp hits me as soon as I open the door and my stomach clenches. I never get used to it. It’s cold too; heating packed in last week. I haven’t been able to get hold of Mum to sort it out. I could ring the gas man, pretend to be her. I’ve done it before – maybe tomorrow.

I zap a microwaveable pasta meal from the fridge – it’s only two days past its best before date – and cut the dried end off a block of cheese, sprinkling the rest over the top of the pasta. I eat it standing at the counter.

My phone vibrates in my pocket. I put it next to my plate and stare at it, shoving another piece of pasta in my mouth.

It's Beanie's home number.

I feel the heat rise in my cheeks again: anger, guilt, disappointment?

Whatever the reason, I don't like feeling it.

My finger hovers over the green accept button but the phone rings off before I can press it.

I'm not even sure I was going to.

If it's important she'll ring back. I don't have anything to say anyway. Well, nothing nice. Some things are more important than school and pleasing your parents. There's nothing wrong with having fun.

The food is undercooked and tastes of cardboard but at least it's warm. I push a bit more down my throat before throwing the rest away.

The lightbulb in the living room blows as I turn it on, so I settle into the darkness and pull a blanket around me. The news is on, showing clips of starving children. That's all that seems to be on the news these days: endless misery and suffering.

There's a horror film on another channel. The bad acting keeps me awake for a while. But my mind is wandering. Wandering to Beanie's red hair, her creased forehead, her crying eyes; wandering to my folded arms, my silence, that missed call. And then my eyes are closing. I'm listening to the distant screaming and jumpy soundtrack until they drift away too.

Somewhere my phone vibrates but I'm too tired and it's too late and, anyway, I'll see her in school tomorrow ...

Chapter Two

It's 9am.

That's what the clock above the TV says. I'm still in the armchair and my alarm hasn't gone off. School started fifteen minutes ago.

Shit!

Makeup from last night – still good; hair up; yesterday's jeans and a T-shirt (still wrinkled and a bit damp) off the radiator.

I catch myself in the mirror. I've looked worse.

‘Sorry I’m late.’ I practise into the reflection.

The tip of my phone is poking out from the side of the chair I slept on. I pry it free and shove it quickly in my jacket pocket.

If I miss a day, they might call Mum – that’s if they can get hold of her – but, if I make it in time for second lesson, the chances of that happening are less likely. The last thing I need right now is Mum mad at me. It’s easier when she just stays away.

I slam the front door shut. At the same time, a rumble of thunder rocks the grey sky. A few neighbours are gathered on the pavement near my gate. I don’t know their names. They turn and stare at me as I pass. Eyebrows V shaped and mouths in straight lines: *my biggest fans*. They keep staring so I give them my best *like I care* look and walk off.

‘Sorry I’m late.’ I practise again. I *almost* sound sorry.

My school – St Jude’s – is the only Catholic comprehensive in Sibrydion. Being one of the smallest towns in south Wales, nowhere takes that long to get to. The school, therefore, is only a few minutes away from my house. This isn’t always a good thing, but today I’m glad of it.

I consider running into the corner shop for breakfast but it’s still weirdly closed. The windows are dark, but I look through anyway. There’s no movement inside. I don’t want to be any later so I leave the shop behind me and pull out my phone to check the time: *eleven missed calls*.

What? I remember ignoring one call – or was it two – but *eleven*?

There are three voice mails too. The first is from last night: ‘*Faye, this is Mrs Beane. Abbey hasn’t come home yet. Is she still with you? She’s not picking up.*’

I snort. Typical Beanie family melodrama.

The second: ‘*Faye, where are you? I still haven’t heard from Abbey. Call me.*’

There’s an edge of panic to her voice. It echoes around in my head, my chest, my gut. But I’m almost at school. I’ll find Beanie there, in English, rolling her eyes at my lack of punctuality.

But there’s a niggler at the back of my brain. Why had it taken her so long to get home?

The final message: ‘*Faye ...*’ Mrs Beane’s voice is quivering, crying. ‘*Faye ... please, please call me.*’

This last message was from 6:30am this morning. I almost drop the phone. She hadn’t gone home at all? She said that’s where she was going but she

I round the corner and freeze.

No one's inside the school. Everyone is out on the grass, the road, the pavement. There's police tape and police and teachers and students and parents and someone is grabbing my shoulders and saying my name.

'Faye, Faye – thank God! You're all right.'

I turn to the voice. It's my form tutor: Mr Westby. He's looking at me, his eyes watery.

'Faye, we've been ringing you all morning,' he says. 'We were just about to send someone to your house.'

My house phone's been disconnected for months.

'Sorry ... I'm late ...' The words tumble out of my mouth but I'm distracted and I'm confused and there are people crying. And a policeman is holding a plastic bag and inside is a yellow scarf.

'Faye?'

'What's going on?' I turn and look at him. 'Where's Beanie?'

'Faye, listen to me. We should go inside.'

But no one is inside. Everyone is out here. Everyone except Beanie.

'Where's Beanie?' I ask again, louder.

People turn and stare. They're all watching, looking at us with pale faces and wide eyes. My head feels funny. The school, the people, the street – they all blur. I reach out for something to hold, but there's only air.

I turn back to Mr Westby, whispering this time, my voice shaking: 'Tell me where she is.'