***1st of November, 2014***

It’s my birthday. Ebony, Marcus and I are driving back from the Oasis, laughing and mucking around. Ebony unclicks her seatbelt and pokes her head through the gap in the seats. All of a sudden, a horn beeps loudly and headlights flash from in front of us. The tires screech and we all jolt forward, apart from Ebony, who flies from the backseat and through the window. Then, all I can see is pure blackness.

 I wake up in a hospital with many machines hooked up to me and the sounds of people talking and machines beeping are blaring in my ears. The first thing I can even think is ‘Where is Ebony?’ but she was gone. And I have her lungs.

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***31st of October, 2015***

My eyes flash open. I feel a strong negative energy swarming in the room around me and I try to sit up to look around, but something seems to be holding me back. I try to scream but all that comes out is a gush of air, it would seem as though my voice box had just stopped working after being starved of oxygen for too long. All I can feel is an overwhelmingly strong pressure pushing down on my chest and someone whispering my name. All of a sudden, the pressure on my chest loosens and without thinking, I try to scramble out of the bed sheets and regain my breath in short frantic pants. But before I can even refill my lungs and calm down, I feel the same immense force pushing me back onto the bed and once again crushing all the air out of me.

Someone starts to say my name again but this time they’re screaming so loud that my ears ache with the pressure and my back starts to arch upwards. My vision doesn’t seem so clear anymore it’s fading black around the edges and it’s slowly closing in. I gasp for air and let out a small wheeze as my back arches even further, making my spine crack. Tears stream down my cheeks trying to help ease my pain but to no avail. I keep trying to make noise to alert my mother. Nothing. I kick my feet against the springy mattress… Still nothing. I start to panic and whack the bedside table in hope that someone will hear me. By now my spine has arched completely and I know that there is nothing I can do because of this insanely powerful force controlling me. My body twists and turns and pain radiates from my spine. I feel like my bones, my skin, my soul are on fire, burning at 10,000 degrees.

“Miaaaa, I’ve found you. You have something of mine. You would think that after everything that’s happened you would be a little more thankful for what was given to you,” I can feel the air being pushed out of my lungs, being sucked into a vacuum, killing me slowly. A single, lone tear trickles down my cheek and off my face leaving, along with the last +bit of strength I have left. Whatever or whoever is in here with me utters their last words to me,

“Goodbye Mia, I’ll make sure I drop by really soon.” Then I can tell it’s gone because there’s a breath of cold air and then the air pressure is released and I can breathe again. A second of ice cold pain shoots through a single spot on my hand, and then just as soon as it came. It’s gone. And left in its place a small ebony coloured shape, the sign of a heartbeat on a monitor fading into oblivion. A reminder of the inevitable fate I have awaiting me.

I wake up to a blinding light coming from the window, and the sound of the curtains being dragged across the long metal pole. “Morning, sweetheart,” My mother says to me with a joyful grin on her face. “Remember what day it is?” “Yeah, my birthday,” I reply.

“Well, then come downstairs!” She says excitedly.

“Hey Mum?” I say hesitantly, itching to tell someone about what happened last night.

“Yeah honey?”

“Um… Last night something really scary happened,”

“What was it?” She looks concerned now and comes to sit on the edge of my bed as I wriggle up into a sitting position.

“Ok so I woke up about 11:45 last night and it felt like there were hundreds of really heavy rocks holding me to my bed and crushing the air out of me. And then I heard someone whispering my name then the pressure increased and it felt like someone was pouring acid over me. And then they started screaming my name really loudly and saying that I have something of their and they want it back. And mum I’m really scared,” I look up at her to gauge her reaction and all I see in her face is sympathy and pity and I knew she didn’t believe me.

“Oh sweetie I’m sure it was just a bad nightmare. It’s not real,” She gives me a sympathetic look, then, like I’m crazy then kisses my cheek and leaves the room yelling over her shoulder that breakfast will be ready in a minute.

 I don’t know why, but the fact that she doesn’t believe me hurts more than I thought it would. But I think that deep down in the depths of my brain I knew that she wouldn’t believe me. My mother doesn’t believe in love, let alone a crazy story about a demon thing visiting me. But I knew that what had happened was real. I could still feel the ice cold pain on my hand. I could still hear the sound of that voice screaming at me without ever showing its face.

But here we were again at my birthday. The day where one a year I am reminded of the fact that the days of my youth are quickly running out and the inevitability of my death. I used to love my birthday. There’s presents and parties and music. But not this year. I can’t find any way in my mind to be happy on a day like today. Not on the anniversary of the day that changed my entire life.

“Mia!” Despite having heard that voice for the last 16 years I jumped at the sudden sound.

“Come down for breakfast honey! I’ve made you you’re favourite and then you can open presents!” I sigh, my brain fogged up and not thinking straight thanks to the near death experience, my recent encounter with my mother and a spirit/demon thing and the lack of sleep that I got last night. But none the less I force myself to get up from bed and pretend that I believe my mum and that it was a dream for one day on my birthday, to help make my mother think that everything is ok and that I’m perfectly normal. And with that thought I make my way slowly and painfully down the stairs and into the slightly run down but still modern and functioning kitchen where are dining table –which is now stacked with my birthday presents- resides.

I hobble over to the table and take a seat, every step filled with pain, every breath like a knife buried deep within my chest. And for what I think is the first time in my life I truly look around and take in my surroundings. I observe my beautiful mother slaving away at the stove, a flour dusted apron tied tightly around her waist and her curly brownish grey hair pulled up into a bun with a pencil. I knew this life was tough on her and I knew that she struggled sometimes to make things work out with all my medical bills. But she was still optimistic and I loved her with everything I had.
“Mia! Snap out of it. Here’s your breakfast and you can start to open your presents now!” She reaches down and places the best smelling plate of food that I have smelt in front of me, then reaching across and dragging a small rectangular shaped wrapped present towards me. My mum takes and seat before speaking once again.

“Well go on. Aren’t you going to open it?” I nod kindly and try to smile. Slowly but surely I begin the painful process of unwrapping the present before me. That’s the thing about unwrapping presents you either rip it open in a hurry or you unwrap it carefully so that none of the paper can get ripped. You are either one or the other, there is no in between. The last piece of carefully aligned sticky tape comes off and the paper falls away to reveal a small navy blue box. Hesitantly I ease open the lid, and inside there is the most gorgeous silver bracelet I have ever seen. It’s a simple silver chain, but hanging from the middle is a silver moon, and as I found out, on the moon the words: *I love you too the moon and back love mum.* Are engraved, and it almost brought a tear to my eye at how gorgeous it was. I hurriedly leaned over and hugged my mum tightly, afraid to ever let go.

“Thank you so much. It’s gorgeous and I love it,” I whisper, but by the way the pressure of her hug increases I know she heard me. That was when the doorbell rung and my mum let go of me to go and answer it. She smiled softly at me before turning on her heel and walking towards the door to answer it.

I couldn’t stop staring at my bracelet, it was amazing. And it meant so much to me. Soon enough mum came back into the room with another wrapped present in her hands.

“The post man just gave this to me. It looks like another birthday present for you! There’s no card on the outside, do you have any idea who it might be from?” She looks at me excitedly, probably thinking that I have a secret admirer or something. I honestly have no idea what it is or who it’s from.

“Well go on!” She looks at me excitedly, acting like a teenage girl who’s gossiping about her boyfriend to her best friend. “Open it!” At this stage I’m quite hesitant to open it, because hey, who wouldn’t be slightly hesitant to open a present that had been sent to them by some unknown person. But none the less I begin to peel back the beautiful royal blue wrapping paper, layer by layer. Slowly my second box of the morning comes into view through the numerous layers of wrapping paper. Unable to contain my curiosity much longer, I quickly rip away the remaining wrapping paper and take out the box and put it on the mahogany table in front of me. My mum literally squeals in excitement and is jumping up and down in her seat like a jack in the box.

“Oh my god. Open it. Open it. Open it Mia!” She’s screaming at me now and I cringe away instinctively and slowly but surely open the box.

It’s a necklace. Quite frankly the most beautiful necklace that I’ve ever seen. But there’s just something about it that gives me chills that shoot down my spine despite the obvious heat of the day. I try to dismiss it as another sign of my insanity, but something keeps the thought of it there in the back of my mind for a long time. It’s another piece of silver jewellery, but this time instead of a bracelet, on the end of the long silver chain is a beautiful locket. On the outside of it is an engraving of a bluebird, flying to the end of the world. Like the necklace itself, there’s just something about that bluebird that makes me shiver, and something about that bird, tugs on a distant and faint memory in the corner of my mind. It’s something that’s just out of reach, and as soon as I get a faint grip on it, it flitters out of my grasp.

“It’s so gorgeous!” She breathes. My mum is as entranced by the mysterious locket as I am, she seems totally captivated by the little bluebird on the front that reminds me of so many things that I can’t remember. The inside of it interests me even more. One side of it has *E&M,* on the other side: You and me. We’re the only ones who know the truth. Is written in a beautiful italic font. But it makes me freeze where I am. I’m catatonic, I can’t move at all. Because everything about those few words makes me want to scream. Because that’s what *she* said, we were the only people on this earth who knew that phrase and knew the meaning of it. But she’s dead, so how is this here? But she’s the only person who knew about that.

My body went cold, everything froze, my brain, time, my heartbeat, the breaths going steadily in and out of my lungs, they freeze too. And that’s when I realise that it’s her. It’s always been her. The feelings of being watched when I know I’m totally alone. The cool breaths of air down my spine on windless days, the voice that talks to me all the time though I’ve never heard it speak. The nightmare from last night, which I now know was definitely not a nightmare but instead a terrifying reality. It was all her, waiting behind the corner for the right moment to strike. And now she’s coming to get me.

“Put it on!” My god Mia just put it on!” Mum’s high pitched and excited voice startles me out of my thoughts. I look right at her eyes and shake my head, trying to tell her that I can’t put it on. But none the less she picks it from my hands and gently, with a mother’s touch, places the locket around my neck.

*They tried to tell me that the accident wasn’t my fault. They tried to tell me that I didn’t do anything wrong and that there was nothing I could have done to prevent the final outcome. But I know better. I KNOW that it was my fault. I KNOW that there were so many things that I could have done to change the course of that day. But I didn’t do anything. And now they’re all dead and I have to live with the consequences.*

*It’s my fault that we were even out that day. I had told them that I really wanted to go for a picnic for my birthday. They didn’t want to, they all wanted to stay at home and throw me a party but I pestered them and pestered them until we packed up the picnic basket and left. If I had just been less selfish and stayed at home then none of it would have happened. If I had just thought about someone other than myself for one moment in my life then none of this would have happened. If I had been nicer and more understanding towards James then none of this would have happened. We stayed at the picnic for a few hours but all of them were anxious to get back. They wanted to go and I wanted to stay. We fought and we divided that day. Even though they wanted to go, Ebony and Marcus stayed with me, but James left, he got frustrated and left to go to the nearest pub to drink away his problems. He had always had a drinking problem, and stress and anxiety always made it worse. And that’s exactly what I provided him with instead of being there for him when he needed me the most. Later that day Ebony, Marcus and I decided to leave and head home, but as we were driving home there was a really bad car accident on the highway that we were on. An unsafe driver that the police later labelled as highly intoxicated, crashed into our small weak car at 100k/m an hour. The ambulance was called and Ebony, Marcus, the other driver and I were rushed to hospital. People say that in a car crash there’s a blinding instant moment of pain and then you feel nothing. But that’s not what it was like at all. I remember vividly to this day: we were laughing and enjoying being free of being responsible, three teenagers living their life and loving it. I could see Ebony’s jet black hair flying around her face with the wind, like a graceful dance. I remember the look of happiness and satisfaction that seemed to be permanently painted on Marcus’s face and I remember the joy in his deep blue eyes. And I remember the euphoric feeling I had, the feeling that only being free and being young can provide. Then, the sight of the other car coming crashing through the metal fence in the middle of the road and coming straight at us. I remember the look on Ebony’s face of pure horror and fear. And I remember Marcus reaching forwards to try and shield us from the impact to no avail as Ebony still went flying out the window and onto the crowded highway.*

*But most of all I remember the pain, it wasn’t an instant like they said. No this was an eternity of excruciating agony that seemed to go on forever. It felt as though someone had snapped every single bone in my body and was now removing them one by one while sticking a million knifes in my skin. It didn’t feel particularly instantaneous. I later found out from the police, that Ebony had died overnight in the hospital after being declared brain dead and that Marcus had suffered a similar fate. That moment crushed my world, it was worse than the accident itself. They had to give me her lungs because mine had stopped working. I live every day with a physical reminder of the fact that I aided my best friend’s death. And that she paid the physical price for my survival. Then I found out that the drunk driver who had crashed into us was James, on his way to find us. And he too was dead.*

I knew that putting on that necklace was a really bad idea. Ever since it was clasped around my neck she’s been calling my name, whispering to me at night and through every waking moment. Somehow putting on that necklace gave her access to my mind, she hasn’t left me alone since. My hands, they shake all the time. I never seem to have enough air to breathe and my head is always throbbing and aching. But I know that it’s her, it has always been her and it always will be her. From the moment I woke up in that hospital bed, until the moment when my heart stops beating.

***3 months later…***

I’m insane. We all know it. It’s not that hard to tell that someone’s crazy when in the middle of a conversation they crouch down and put their hands over their ears and start screaming at someone to stop with tears streaming down their face. That’s when you know someone’s crazy. They’ve decided to put me in a psych ward to try and drug me so much that I spend the rest of my life in a daze.

“*Miiiiiiiiiiiaaaaaaaaaaa…* You know that it’s all your fault. It’s your fault that James and I died. And then you took something of mine, and I want it back. So that’s what I’m going to do. I’m going to get it back. And then you can die and I can live. You know they’d be better off without you here. You know that. When you die no one’s going to miss you,” Her voice makes my whole body tremble with fear and anxiety. I can’t deal with this for much longer. Every waking hour is spent listening to her taunt me and make me hate myself even more. My mum, my own mother, can’t even look at me like I’m a porcelain doll that’s teetering on the edge of a table, about to fall and smash into a thousand tiny pieces. But that’s ok, because I know that my end is near. So very near. And I’m ok with that. Because at the moment living seems worse than dying, because for as long as I’m alive, Ebony will be there to tell me that I’m better off dead. So for me being dead is ok. And when it comes for me I’ll welcome it with open arms, like best friends that have been separated for too long.

*This is it. I know it is. This is the end. By now I can’t tell the difference between hell and reality. Between life and death. Between Ebony and Satan. She’s going to kill me. Death has come for me. Ebony has come for me. But perhaps, while living like this, I’m already dead.*

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***Epilogue***

***Mia died 97 days after her 17th birthday. Anyone that met her could tell that she had lost all her will to live. She was simply sick of this life. She eventually over the course of 3 months, lost all track of reality and what was real. She would spend her entire day curled up in a ball, rocking back and forth, not eating anything, just muttering the same word over and over again.* Stop. *Some other days she would be catatonic, unable to move a muscle, staying put for an entire day or even multiple days. It’s one of the saddest things on earth, watching someone that you love slip slowly into insanity. But Mia’s mother had to do it knowing that she was completely helpless. No amount of drugs or electrical shocks or psychiatric hospital stays could help her. So Mia’s mother spend every day for three months wondering what was going to happen next.***

 ***The cause of death was originally unknown but after the post mortem requested by her mother, the shocking cause of death became painstakingly clear.***

***Mia died because she had no lungs. Not one single person alive knows how this happened, it was just as if her lungs had just disappeared one day, never to return. When they cut open her chest they found just an empty space where her lungs should have been. Empty space. Except for one thing. A small piece of paper. The size of a sticky note, placed inside her ribs for the world to see. On the note:*** *Surprise –E.* ***was written in a red substance which may have been Mia’s own blood. The most puzzling part about the whole case was that she had no scar, nothing that shows how her lungs could have been removed for the note placed inside her. No way of knowing. Doctors and scientists all around the world thought for years how it could have happened, but no one came close to learning the truth. People had nightmares about her every night, torturous dreams. Living hell some would say. No one ever forgot Mia’s name. No one ever figured out where her lungs went or who killed her.***

 ***I’ve been dead 20 years.***