*December 23rd, 2006*

*The day everything changed...*

The day started off well enough. It was a mild December here in Illinois, which would only lead to one thing: a blizzard. Snow, of course, is inevitable in this part of the country, although my personal preference would be to ever only have snow on Christmas.

Today was the big senior Christmas party for the high school and my brother, Adam, was probably the most excited. Being the senior class president, he was in charge of everything. My guess is that the planning began as soon as he was elected class president his freshman year. Everything had to be perfect and absolutely nothing could go wrong, but it would not be right for it to be that way now would it?

Nothing ever seemed to go wrong for Adam. He had the better grades, the greatest friends, all the girls wanted to date him. He was highly respected among his teachers; even the principal thought he was the best, perhaps he was. It is hard to live up to someone who cannot seem to screw up. He was the better child. Our parents seemed to idolize him and are constantly asking why I could not be more like Adam was. The legacy he leaves behind is something I can only ever hope to get close to.

So needless to say, the party went by without a single hitch. However, the drive back home did not go quite so well. The accident is something that will forever be replaying in my mind. The lights, smells, screams, blood, silence and tears are embedded within my memory for all time.

August 7th, 2007

The first day of senior year…

Small towns can either be a blessing or a curse. It all depends on who you are or rather who you are related to. You will either be part of the crowd or forever the outsider. Clearly, I am the latter. Adam was the only exception I have ever known.

Standing in front of the school debating whether to go in or ditch, I cannot help but think of my brother. This was his school. He would know what to do.

“Oh, Adam, how I wish you could be here to make this last year bearable.”

This would be so much easier if he were still here. Everything has spiraled out of control since he died. Our parents split so now instead of getting yelled at for something once I get a double dose. Every mistake is an “Adam would never have done that” moment. Let’s not even start on grades. That’s more of an “Adam would have done better” or “Adam would be so disappointed” moment.

“Oh, Adam, why couldn’t you have been less perfect?”

That’s the thing; as perfect as Adam was, he wasn’t. I kept all the secrets. I took the fall for things at home. He always took care of things at school. He was always able to get me out of trouble there. I owe him my life for that. I would trade mine for his any day. He deserves to be here, not me. It’s my fault he’s not here anymore. They keep telling me it isn’t, but I know the truth. I was there, they weren’t.



The temperature outside must be at least 100 degrees without the slightest breeze. Inside this crowded, small classroom with no air conditioning, the heat just melts your brain. How can they expect us to learn anything in here?

“Amelia, would you at least pretend you’re paying attention?” the annoying Mr. Meyers, our English teacher scolds.

“Sorry, Mr. Meyers. I was just so entranced by your description of this book. Your take on it is very, what’s the word, dull. I couldn’t help but fade out,” I reply simply.

“Your brother, Adam, never thought the story as dull, Amelia. Perhaps you should try to see it more from his view.”

There it is, the ever outstanding Adam that the teachers love to shove down my throat as well. As if I didn’t already know he loved the book. He could never stop talking about it. I would love to burn it and I hate the idea of burning books, but this is the exception.

“I’ll see what I can do,” I respond quietly. Then Meyers goes off on some other detail about the author and I fade back out and doodle on my notes.



“Mia!”

I turn around and see Charlotte running up to me.

“Oh my goodness Mia, how are you? It has been like forever since I have seen you. How was your summer? Did you go anywhere? How are dealing with your parents splitting? That has to be tough, huh?” she rambled in a single breath.

Charlotte had been a friend up until we reached high school. Then she became that typical popular cheerleader girl who only wanted to spread gossip and knew everything about everyone. We tried to make it work for a while, but we just ended up being too different. She’s too much a part of that in-crowd for it to every truly work out.

“Hi, Charlotte,” I reply, bored.

“Mia, darling, you have to fill me in on just simply everything.”

“There’s really not a lot to say Charlotte. It was a pretty typical summer. I read mostly.”

“Come now. There must have been a summer fling or last minute trip to Paris or even a beach?”

“No, Charlotte. The most traveling I did was done in my head. We should get going or we’ll be late for class.”

“Oh alright, I’ll call you later and you can fill me in then.”

“Okay.”

That phone call will never happen. She hasn’t called me since the accident.



After school, I walk home. I do my best never to drive anywhere unless I have to. My mother thinks it’s simply a leftover thing from the accident and that I should get over it. If only it could be that easy.

“I’m home, Mom,” I call out.

Silence.

“Mom?”

Nothing.

Well, I guess she’s out with some guy, as usual. I hardly ever see her. I generally only see her enough to reprimand me for not getting better grades or not finishing the chores or for nothing, which is her favorite.

I grab the bowl of grapes from the counter and shuffle off to my room, where I’ll stay until tomorrow. I might as well at least attempt my homework. Not that anyone would believe I actually do my homework or at least try to. I wish Adam could help me with it. He always knew the answers. Oh Adam.

August 10th, 2007

Fridays are the worst and the greatest thing ever. They are similar to Mondays. I have this love/hate relationship with school. As much as I don’t belong here, I feel more at home at school than at home. I love learning. I’m not fond of homework though. I need a break from “home” every once in a while, but I sometimes wish it didn’t mean I had to actually go home. The moment I’m home, I’d rather be back at school.

It could be worse. I should be more grateful for the roof over my head, I know. There’s just this trapped feeling that I cannot seem to shake here. I cannot wait until I graduate and find a way to leave this place behind me forever. I don’t want to live in the shadow of my dead brother forever. At least he doesn’t have to do math anymore.

“Okay folks; remember you have to do all the even problems on pages 8-10. There may or may not be a quiz on Monday. Also don’t forget the away game tomorrow. Extra credit if I see you,” Mr. Spaz reminds us.

So, his name is actually Mr. Jackson, but he goes off on random tangents so often that he’s earned that spaz-tastic nickname. He’s had it for as long as I can remember. Also, I will not be attending the game, if it’s the last thing I do. The extra credit is not worth sitting around for three or four hours while boys toss and dribble a ball up and down the court. Sports are not my strong suit. That may be the one thing my brother and I had in common. He was more of the cool nerd type than the jock type which is a relief honestly. However not participating in a sport means I still have to do P.E., which has to be the worst part of the day.

“And stretch those muscles. Now 25 sit-ups and pushups,” commands the P.E. teacher Ms. Walters. “Amelia, please at least pretend you’re doing them.”

Oops, I thought it was time to relax my muscles and take a short nap. I have never understood why we spend half the period stretching. It seems kind of excessive to me.

“Today we’ll be pairing up for our partners’ badminton tournament. I know we’re doing it early this year, but I want to see you energized early on. I know this is one of the favorite activities.”

Well, too bad you are making us partner up. I much prefer singles. At least this is one thing I can do. Unfortunately, I will get stuck with someone who doesn’t like me, which is anyone.

“Mia, will you partner with Felice, please.”

Or worse I get the new girl, because I won’t treat her horribly, because I am the good girl now, thanks to Adam.

“Hello, I’m Felice. I don’t think we’ve met yet,” she says as she walks over and then proceeds to give me a hug. “I’m sorry about Adam.”

“Oh, umm thanks,” I stutter out. No one has said that in a while and certainly not someone I don’t know. “You knew Adam?” I ask, curious.

“Yes. We were pretty close actually,” she responds hesitantly.

“Oh, okay. Well, I’m sorry too. And I’m sorry that I don’t recognize you. I knew most of my brother’s friends and I don’t remember a Felice.”

“We weren’t very public in our friendship, so I am not surprised. Well, we should probably get to it?”

“Oh, yes, I suppose so. Would you like to serve first?



Lunch time, the only time I can lower my guard a little. Everyone is far too busy attending to their cliques to give me a glance. I don’t bother with a lunch though. I usually just chew a piece of gum and doodle or finish up some homework for the afternoon classes.

Today though I can’t stop going over that small conversation with Felice. I feel like I know her, but I just can’t seem to place her among my brother’s friends. She’s a mystery that I will have to sort out.

While I’m sitting there doodling, I find myself reaching to my neck to play with my necklace, except that it’s not there. I find myself doing that a lot. I lost it the night of the accident. Adam had given it to me as a present on one of my birthdays. I don’t remember which one. As much as I’d like it back, I’m not sure how I would feel about having it back. It was one of the things we were arguing about on the way home that night. Oh great, now someone will probably see me trying not to cry. Never, ever cry at school. Crap, Mr. Meyers is giving me a look. Just go hide and do your smoking, like no one knows what you’re doing. I go back to doodling and pretend I didn’t notice him noticing. Well I am certainly ready for lunch to be over now. Maybe I’ll just go to the next class a bit early.



“Don’t forget we’re taking a trip to that astrology shop next weekend, so you have to get permission from your parents,” Mr. Ross reminds us. “You will be giving a report on what you learn about the different signs and how the stars have played a role in how generations have used them to justify how they live or how the stars can predict what will happen.”

Science is by far one of my favorite subjects and Mr. Ross teaches most of them, this being Astronomy 2. I’m not sure how I feel about mixing astrology into it, but I guess it could be interesting. I am not looking forward to getting permission to go though. Perhaps I could just forge a name somewhere. I highly doubt anyone would notice anyway. However, if I want any chance of maybe getting a few dollars to spend I will have to ask, so I might as well get it done as soon as I can locate a parent. It is not always the easiest thing to do.

“Also, there will be a quiz,” he explains.

Great, another quiz to study for this weekend.

“Right now,” he adds.

Oh. This will not turn out well. Well, onto failing!

*December 16th, 2006*

“What do you mean I can’t go the party, Adam?” I ask trying very hard not to yell.

“Mom doesn’t think it’s a good idea for you to be there with a bunch of older students” he responds, again.

I swear he has no better excuses than to just blame mom for why I can’t go. I want a real answer, but I know I’ll never get one.

“How is this any different from prom or other dances or parties and you’re not that much older you know. It’s only a high school party. It’s not a college frat party.”

“Mia, it’s for seniors. I can’t have my little sister hanging around.”

“Since when do you care that I’m your *little* sister?” I ask, genuinely confused. “Is there someone you don’t want me to be near?”

Sighing, he turns and starts to turn away when it dawns on me. Of course there’s someone, a girl. Deflated, I go back to my room and start reading some random book that was just lying around.

August 12th, 2007

I wake to the smell of coffee. Now that’s unusual. Mom is never up this early on a Sunday. I wonder if this is a good time to find permission to go the astrology shop thing for my astronomy class. Better to do it while she’s here or there’s no telling when I’ll see her next.

As I walk down the stairs I begin to hear voices and I feel like I’m thrown back to last Christmas all over again.

“Should we leave her up there?” “Don’t you think she should go the visitation? Adam was her brother. Doesn’t she care?” “We have to get going; go get her.”

When I open my eyes, I am sitting on the steps and some guy is staring at me like he’s not sure what to do. Great, mom must have had one of her dates stay the night. Shouldn’t he have left by now?

“Are you okay, Amelia? It is Amelia right?” he asks. “I’m terrible with names.”

I stare at him like he’s some strange alien from another planet. When was the last time I met one of mom’s dates and he knows my name? What is going on here?

“Amelia, sweetie, you’re blocking the whole staircase.”

Ah, so he must not know my name from anything good, lovely.

“Sorry, Mom. I was just on my way back upstairs.”

“Nonsense. Come eat breakfast with us. I’d like you to meet Troy anyway.”

Troy? Well, I don’t think I know any Troy’s. He seems nice. I suppose I ought to give this a shot, especially because I still need to get that permission.

“Okay, but I’ll going to go change first.”



“So, you’re a senior this year, Amelia?” Troy asks.

“I am, yes.”

“So you might know my sister’s daughter, Felice. She just transferred to your school.”

Felice huh, this conversation just got a whole lot more interesting. Maybe I can find out who she is this way.

“I do. We’re actually partners right now in our P.E. class. She’s a great badminton player and she seems really nice.” Sucking up a little never hurts either.

“She’s a good girl. She got herself into a little trouble last year, but she’s done great at pulling herself back together.”

“What kind of trouble? She doesn’t seem like the troublesome type.” That sounds innocent right?

“Oh, well I’m not sure it’s really my business to discuss, but I’m sure she’ll tell you when she’s ready.”

Darn. Well, at least I know there’s more to discover.

“Well, I think we’ll get along pretty well. I’d be more than happy to help show her around if she needs it.”

“That’s very kind of you, Amelia. Adam would be proud, I think,” mom adds in.

An Adam compliment? I think that’s a new one. This has got to be the strangest day ever. This might be a good time to ask.

“Mom, there’s this outing for my astronomy class next weekend and I was wondering if I could get your permission to go? There’s an assignment and everything surrounding the trip so it would be a huge advantage to go.”

“Well, if it’s for a class, I suppose that’s alright. I’ll leave a little money behind for you. You’ll need to make it last all weekend though. Troy has to go out of town for a meeting and asked me to go. Will you be okay by yourself?”

Is this really happening? The house to myself for an entire weekend, this is unreal. I’ll take it though.

“I’m sure I’ll be fine. I’ll be out with the class Saturday so I’ll only have Sunday to worry about, but I’ll have plenty of homework to fill up my time. What do you do for a living, Troy? Traveling for work sounds exciting.”

“Oh, I just put presentations together for business meetings. I am always on call for last minute changes. It can be kind of a hassle.”

“Well I think that sounds cool. Perhaps, I can go sometime for the experience.”

“I think that’s a great idea. Maybe you and Felice can both go with me sometime and then go do some shopping or something. She hasn’t gotten out much lately. It’s time she got back to being a teen again.”

Go back to being a teen? That sounds like another clue. I should probably be writing this all down. Perhaps I’ll excuse myself and go do some homework, some Felice investigating homework. She definitely has some secrets and I want to know them. I need to find out how she’s connected to Adam, because I think that’s the most important question. Why don’t I remember her?