

Title: Our song

Soundtrack link:

<https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLNiNmi3gk9sk6TKayEvO0hi2Fo-WthaWf>

https://open.spotify.com/playlist/4vVYKKhPXuk76m7wTAicY?si=OAVMGxHyQISvOY9dFTsLFg&dl_b ranch=1

Copy:

My legs give way beneath me as I collapse onto the tattered rug mum brought back from Thailand. I lie there, watching the shiny black shoes of the policewoman and my parents' slippers merge in and out of focus. It is like someone has put their hand down my throat and ripped out my lungs. I watch my dad put a concerned hand on my mum's trembling shoulders. And no one notices me on the itchy rug gasping for breath, wondering how my best friend could leave me like this.

'Jem, come along now. I'll help you up the stairs – it's very late.'

I look up into my dad's weary face.

The policewoman gives me a grave smile and says 'I'm sorry Jemima. I know this is hard for you but Sadie was just unlucky. We see some terrible things happen to good people and this is unfortunately one of those cases.'

Dapples of sunlight dance on my bedroom walls, and for a moment all is quiet save the comforting gurgle of the dishwasher downstairs. I snuggle down in my bed; then realise I'm wearing yesterday's clothes. Yesterday.

Yesterday.

A wave crashes around me and I start shaking uncontrollably.

I notice that someone has left a tray of food for me on my bedside table – orange juice, a bowl of plain pasta, some crisps and a note from my older brother.

Jem, eat up.

Love you, Luke xx.

That's the food I usually have when I'm off school sick. I try to eat, really try.

Later I hear the gentle footfall of my mum on the landing and she's at my bedroom door with two mugs. She gets under the duvet with me and asks how I'm feeling. Eventually I find words: 'I don't understand why this happened to Sadie. Why was it my best friend that had to die?'

She sighs, evidently struggling. 'I know Jem, it's difficult. Remember that it wasn't because she didn't love you. It was a tragic accident.'

Her voice has dwindled to a whisper. She's thinking what it would be like if it had been me. I watch her for a while as she falls asleep, and then I creep downstairs.

I curl up on the battered old sofa in the living room, the air still redolent of the shock of last night. The police officer said Sadie was on her balcony, that they don't know why she fell. The girl who showed up at nursery on the first day in a ridiculous Sleeping Beauty princess dress. I remember it so clearly. But now she's gone.

Suddenly I feel the desperate need to be closer to Sadie so I leave a note on the kitchen table, shove a coat over yesterday's clothes and head to Sadie's.

Sadie lives – lived, in a newly built block of flats. I get the lift up. Sadie's flat is on the second from top floor and I can't help but think how high it is.

Now I'm at the door, I hesitate. What am I supposed to say to Sadie's parents? I take a deep breath and then the door opens. Sadie's dad.

'I'm so, so sorry, Martin.'

He shakes his head, as if in answer to a question I didn't ask.

Sadie's room. It's what I think Sadie's mind looked like. An explosion of colour and chaos. Something flashes in the corner of my eye – Sadie's phone with a notification from PrettyLittleThing.

I unlock the phone without a second thought (her password is Gemstone because of my name). It opens on Spotify on our playlist we made together last week. It dawns on me that she must have been listening to this music moments before... it happened. I press play and it's halfway through Bad Guy by Billie Eilish.

A memory floats on the melody towards me, just out of reach. Then I remember everything and my heart fractures into a thousand pieces.

I sigh contentedly as I pack my bag for school tomorrow. Homework done – an essay on Macbeth's violent nature brought about by his pure, unfiltered ambition. I'm the artsy English-history nerd; Jem's the mathsy-sciencey one. I grab a coke and head to the balcony. I love it out here. Sitting on the ledge with my legs dangling down, I can see the lights of the city flicker on as the sky turns a rich navy. Music – that's what I'm missing. I put on mine and Jem's new playlist. There's only three songs on it so far and Jem suggested all of them. Yes! I love this one – Bad Guy so I turn it up super loud.

I don't see the figure in my bedroom until it reaches the balcony door. The blood in my veins freezes and I let go of my coke bottle. It smashes onto the floor. They're wearing an oversized black hoodie with their head down. I'm trapped out on the balcony. My hands shake violently as I grip onto the ledge.

'What do you want?' I ask bravely.

And they look me in the eyes and I let go of the breath I didn't realise I was holding.

Jem. It's just Jem. My Jem.

'What are you doing here?' I shout over my music.

But she doesn't reply. And I suddenly feel that it's not my Jem, not properly. Because that's definitely not her smile. It's sort of crooked, broken, like she's pretending. And her eyes are fixed on me in some sort of staring contest gone wrong.

She advances forwards, the gap between us gone.

'Jem' I plead, desperate to reach her. But she shakes her head. I feel my heart pounding in my chest and I try to step round her but Jem forces me back onto the ledge.

'I love you Jem' I manage to say as she holds me over the edge.

And without so much as a word, Jem lets go and I'm falling down...

down...

down...