

*Étoile* Series



# 16

REASONS

PROLOGUE

SUFEN ADAMS

# PROLOGUE

## avoidance

- an act or practice of avoiding or withdrawing from something  
(Merriam-Webster)

**“JOJO!”** Iris called after Jasmine.

“Don’t...” Jasmine turned around and held her hand up, stopping her best friend from coming closer.

They were standing in the hallway outside Jasmine’s suite at DeMont Beverly Hills, which was a renowned hotel owned by the family of Iris’ husband Thomas, and where Jasmine had been staying since her whole world collapsed.

Iris opened her hand and showed Jasmine her car’s key fob. “I think you need this,” she said with a tender smile.

*Shit!* Jasmine rued. After her dramatic exit, it would be a huge embarrassment if she had to go back to the room full of friends and family to retrieve that.

However, she could care less...

Jasmine stared at the key fob for a few seconds before she lunged forward and wrapped her arms around Iris. “Thank you...” she whispered, feeling grateful that her friend was not trying to persuade her to stay. She knew she should not run away... Today was her beloved Marcus’ funeral after all. Her avoidance of facing this unmerciful reality was merely to retain her sanity.

“And this...” Iris said, taking out a card from her pants pocket.

Jasmine pulled back and looked at what was in Iris’ hand. *A SIM card?* She tilted her head quizzically, staring at a plastic card.

“You are going to put this in your phone and set this number as the primary number. And—” Iris paused, looking at Jasmine with sympathy in her expression. “I forgot you are a technology illiterate. Sorry... Give me

your phone.” She handed Jasmine the key fob and held her hand palm-up.

*Did she just insult her recently-widowed friend?* Jasmine scowled. However, she knew that her friend was not wrong though. She reached into her tote bag, pulled out her phone, and put it in Iris’ hand.

Iris took the phone out of its clear case and handed the case back to Jasmine. She reached into her pocket again and produced a small metal pin.

“You came prepared.” Jasmine was amused.

“Always.” Iris smirked and started to work on the phone. After she was done, she held the phone up to face Jasmine to unlock it and then proceeded to rapidly tap on the screen.

Jasmine had no clue what Iris was doing to her phone and she did not really care. Gazing at her best friend, who was focusing on setting up her phone, Jasmine felt consoled. Her best friends flew back from Switzerland soon after she told her that Marcus was receiving in-home hospice care and it was only a matter of time, and she had been sheltering Jasmine from the ferocious reality since then.

“There...” Iris handed the phone back to Jasmine and said, “I turned off your number, so no one can reach you. And I added a second number to your phone. It has unlimited everything. I am the only person who knows this new number, so only I will bug—”

Jasmine lunged forward again and embraced Iris warmly as she could not ask for a better friend.

“...bug you...” Iris finished what she was saying in a whisper.

“Thank you.” Jasmine gave her best friend a kiss on her cheek and unwrapped her arms.

“Anything for you, love.” Iris gave Jasmine’s hand a comforting squeeze. “I’m not going to ask where you’re going. And stay there for as long as you need.”

Giving Iris another grateful smile, Jasmine turned towards the elevator lobby and headed to her escape with no destination.



ONE of Jasmine’s favorite things to do since she moved to California was driving her Mini Cooper convertible along the Pacific Coast Highway.

Going north now, she was not sure how far she would go, but she was not ready to stop yet.

Suddenly... The prelude of a too familiar song came out of the speakers.

“Sixteen reasons...” a chorus started before she could skip the song, switch to radio, or shut the damn entertainment system off.

Jasmine hastily tapped on the touch screen, her eyes flicking between the screen and the road in front of her. Her car started to swerve and nearby vehicles blew their angry horns.

Quickly, she gripped the steering wheel with both hands and pulled over to the side of the road.

Gone were the ear-piercing horns and the song that triggered her frantic reaction, and all she could hear now were the sounds of ocean waves crashing and passing cars. She shut her eyes, her heart pounding heavily.

“Damn it!” She smacked the steering wheel with both hands and banged the back of her head against the headrest, feeling anger emerging.

*I hate you, Marcus!*