

PROLOGUE

“We all carry things inside of us that no one else can see. They hold us down like anchors. They drown us out at sea.”

18th March 2004 (10 years ago)

Hugging her mother and father goodbye before they left to Australia for business matters was hard for little Aria. She didn't understand why the company stuff they had to settle was so important. She hugged her mother so hard till her hands felt numb. She wrapped her legs around her father's waist and refused to ever let go.

She didn't get why she wasn't allowed to come along. Skipping one day of school shouldn't be that much of a big deal, she thought.

“Bye daddy, bye mommy!” She waved at both her parents from the door of what her friends called a palace.

“Bye Ariana!” Her mother waved back and blew

a kiss. Heidi Smith was the only person ever to call her daughter by her full name. Heidi wore a pencil skirt and a pale blue blouse that brought out her eye color. She was truly a beautiful woman, with or without make up.

“Bye princess!” Her father waved enthusiastically at her as her mother got into the car. “We’ll be back soon!”

“Promise?” Aria yelled and her father mouthed “Promise” and nodded.

After they left, she felt lonely and bored. The babysitter and maid in the house had no idea how to have fun like her parents did. Aria went to bed early that night since she had nothing to do and that her mother had told her to do so. Obedient, she hopped on her bed, thinking of dreamland.

But there was never one.

That night, came the most devastating news she has ever heard in her life. Aunt Mel came knocking on the door late that night and hugged her as hard as she could with tears pouring out of her eyes like a river. At first, Aria didn’t understand a single thing. But then came Uncle Oscar.

The most idiotic thing that Uncle Oscar, Aunt Mel’s husband, did was bringing the naïve, clueless little Aria to the accident scene and later to the hospital to see her parents’ dead body. She thought Uncle Oscar had never intended to do her trauma but the shock from all the carnage and blood had send a message to Aria’s senses—that the two most important person in her life

is now gone.

When they got into the car to leave for the airport, that was the last glimpse of their living souls. Those few last words they said to her, they were the words of farewell. That was the last blow of a kiss her mother ever gave her, the last wave her parents gave her, their last hugs, their last kisses. The very last time anyone had ever called her Ariana.

It was their last everything.

CHAPTER 1

"A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step."

I could hear the soft wind blowing lightly against the curtains through the open windows. Everyone is sound asleep and this would be the last chance for me to escape. My bag is packed with everything I needed and I crept noiselessly down the stairs. I grabbed the handle to steady myself. If I were to tumble, trip or let go of this bag, it would surely make a loud thud on the floor. And I would get caught, again.

I felt a clench in my stomach. Leaving this place is supposed to be easy. The years and years of pain and suffering in here is supposed to make it easier for me to leave. Why is it so hard?

As I tread the stairway, I realized. I was going to leave Jason behind, the only person that has ever treated me like a human, the only one to see me as someone who

can feel pain. "I'm sorry." I whispered as I passed his room. I left a letter on his study table earlier and I can only hope he would understand. Of course he would, he has suffered here as well albeit not as much as I had been.

He was Melanie and Oscar Adam's son, adopted of course. If he was their birth son, he would've definitely inherited all the bad in them, just like their biological daughter, Laura had. I figured it was genetics that both mother and daughter were so cold-hearted and mean.

I reminisced the events that happened in this house's cold halls. Some were good memories, but most were bad. Waking up at 5 a.m. every day, doing the laundry, vacuuming every piece of furniture they had and all those other chores. By the time everyone wakes up, everything would be squeaky clean and breakfast would be ready.

Aunt Mel and Laura would get me to paint their nails, get them coffee or tea, find them their clothes, everything from top to bottom is managed by me. It's like I never get time to study and don't have my own precious time at all. I'm glad I have Jason. He's sweet and charming. I've always seen him as my best friend. He had thick brown hair, grey eyes and he's also very smart and athletic. Being two years older than I am, he has become my tuition teacher.

At times Jason would help me out with some of the chores when his mom wasn't around. Laura would threaten him to tell Aunt Mel sometimes but Jason would scare her off just by glaring at her. Laura tends

to hide her fear of him by whipping her blond hair in front of his face indignantly, an act which she inherited from her father pretending she isn't intimidated by her brother's fierce glare.

I'd tell him he's lucky that Aunt Mel goes easy on him, compared to what I've been through. Even though it's almost impossible to believe but she loves him; like any mother in the world would. Unlike me...

I kept myself stable on my feet. Being the clumsy girl I am, I have to be conscious. If my awkward self decided to trip on something or break anything at this point, I'm practically doomed for life. The smell of fresh lacquer enters my nose as I walk into the newly-furnished kitchen. The fittings in the kitchen were purportedly the 'most beautiful piece of furniture on earth', according to Aunt Mel. When it arrived yesterday, I've got to say she was right.

I hurried past it, to get to the back door. I took a deep breath, glanced at the house one last time before I opened the door and make a run for it. The cab would be waiting nearby. I've formed a perfect plan in my head about my escape; but then again the plan is probably not that perfect. I know I can't go too far away from here. My lawyer would be seeing me in a month and if I catch a plane to somewhere far away, I may never return to claim my father's billions.

I am an orphan; my parents died in a horrible plane crash when I was eight. A year after, I got to know that as soon as I turned nineteen, I would be the richest young adult in the country. That was when my aunt

and uncle volunteered to become my caretaker. When I turned twelve, I figured out their motive. They never actually cared, they only wanted the money.

I've been saving enough for myself to live until the day comes. Thank you for the precious allowance Aunt Mel! I sure as hell would be using it for the best! All this while living here as a maid was definitely worth the thousands of dollars I've saved.

I'm finally free from the evil queen and her wretched young daughter! Yes. I could feel it in my lungs, I'm free. This is the smell of freedom. I've got my passport, my money, my cell phone and my ID card all in my sling bag.

I got into the cab and the driver loaded my luggage in the car boot. He was a middle-aged man with a thick mustache and kind eyes.

"I'm so sorry I'm late, I had a slight delay in plans just now. Thank you for waiting though," I apologized to the driver.

"It's OK miss! Where to?" he asked.

"Do you happen to know any motels out of town maybe?" I'm still not sure where to go. Again, I repeat: I didn't really have much of a perfect plan.

"I sure do. We'll reach there in 40 minutes, maybe?" he said.

"That'll do, thank you." He drove off. I plugged my headphones and tried to mentally map out the plan for tomorrow. I needed to get my mind straight. I needed to find an apartment at least. Maybe I should

get a job somewhere. Being an accountant or work in a big office would be no problem for me. I've gotten my studies straight even while being a maid, my brain is worth something. My aunt did send me to school. She was forced to of course, it's the state law. If she didn't she'll lose me and she indeed didn't want that.

I've cleverly removed the GPS-tracker in my phone that Aunt Mel attached. It is something that parents usually install on their children's phone in case they go missing but like any other apps, it can be disabled. I'm surprised I could do it though, it took days but I finally did it! Not so stupid now am I Aunt Mel? Good luck finding me in the city!

The cab stopped in front of a 24-hour motel that looked pretty cheap and affordable. Great!

"That'll be 40 dollars Miss," I looked at the meter and saw that it was 60 dollars. "Don't worry, last customer of the day discount." He smiled.

"Here you go, thanks for the ride!" I shook his hand and smiled back at him. He unloaded my luggage and I went to the main desk to purchase a room for the night. Hope they're not full.

"Excuse me, one room with a single bed please," I said to the receptionist.

"Name please," she asked.

"Freya James," I answered without stuttering. I couldn't give her my real name. That would be a stupid act for a runaway.

“Beautiful name you got there Freya, please complete this form,” she handed me a pen and a one page form. I filled it up and handed it to her. Thank God they only asked for simple information.

“Done,” I smiled sweetly at her.

“Thank you, here is your key. Have a great night Miss James,” she mirrored my smile.

I grabbed the keys and head for Room 111. Unlocking the door and turning on the lights in the room, I found the place quite impressive. It had a nice single bed at the center of the room, bright aquamarine curtains, and a medium-sized bathroom; they even had a bathtub! Perfect.

I checked the time to see it was almost 2 a.m. No time for a bath now. I removed my dirty jeans and jumped on the bed. It’s time for some sleep. I didn’t think police would be looking for me at the moment. Aunt Mel would think that’s too much of a risk involving the police. They would ask why I fled the house in the first place and I’ll tell them exactly why. That would cause Aunt Mel and her family loss, great shame. Tomorrow, I said, is going to be a big day!

I’m going to meet new people, get a place of my own. I’m going to make my parents proud and the best of all is that Aunt Mel and her stupid prick of a daughter, Laura, would have nothing to do with it!

I should have some champagne to drink tonight but I’ll get myself some tomorrow. So much for making your parents proud. My subconscious glared at me. Chill out girl, I’m going to live the life I’ve always wanted to

live. A life filled with freedom and space.

I took out my parents' picture from my bag and brought it to my chest. "I miss you guys," I whispered and kissed the picture. I closed my eyes and said my prayers. Goodnight Aria; may tomorrow be a bright day for you. I smiled and sunk into slumber.