

Prologue

Sydney, July 1924

When Andrew Buchanan returned home from the Great War with a bride in tow, his parents were not pleased to say the least. His father stated that at twenty-one he should be amassing a fortune not shackling himself to a woman; his mother was simply unimpressed that his wife, in her esteemed opinion, lacked proper breeding. His mother wept, begging her son to send the girl back home to London, and of course he steadfastly refused. Andrew was in love with Louisa Crawly and he didn't care for his parents' bigoted views. He'd never been one infatuated with the fairer sex until one cold February morning when amongst the grey and dreary buildings he spied a waif-thin girl, barely older than sixteen, walking towards him wearing an emerald green dress. The rich jewel colour juxtaposed with the grey surroundings made her look almost unreal, like an apparition amongst the dreary buildings. As she drew close, he could tell she was no girl, she was a woman.

Her bonneted head was tipped down, her gaze trained on the wicker basket in her hands, but not a second later, as if sensing someone was watching, she looked up and Andrew swore he felt his heart skip a beat. She was beautiful, with a delicate face, porcelain skin and a smile that seemed out of place against such gloominess.

The moment he had clapped eyes on his darling Louisa on that deserted street in London, he knew without a doubt that she was to be his wife.

Their courtship had been a whirlwind and they were married within a month of that fateful meeting. It was his idea to wed in haste; Andrew knew he would be called back to battle, and, merely days after they became man and wife, he was. Prior to their meeting, he had become disillusioned with the war. Andrew had freely joined to serve King and country, but after years of losing what seemed like an endless stream of his men, he had started to question it all. Now, he had a reason to return home, a purpose—his Louisa.

But now, some five years later, a part of him perhaps wished he'd listened to his parents. For if he had, he wouldn't be standing at the foot of a hospital bed, his beloved dead before him. Just hours after giving birth to their children.

Twin daughters. A surprise to them both, a happy one—or so Louisa had convinced him to believe. Their physician, Dr Howard, claimed that it was not unheard of for women to pass away from the strain of childbirth, even more common when it was, as he termed it, a multiple. As the doctor spoke, Andrew could not help but shift his gaze to the second child. If it had been just the one child, Louisa may have survived; he had to shake off his resentment.

His daughters were identical, but he could already see the difference in the two. The first one, precious Olive, slept so soundly, so contentedly. Yet the second child, who'd caused the pain, who would undoubtedly be the cause of inevitable havoc, was wide awake as if eager to explore the world she'd only just entered.

If it were not for you ...

Just then the baby seemed to look straight at Andrew and shame overcame him.

His dear, sweet Louisa, who was overjoyed that after four years of marriage they were finally to become parents. She had relished her time of confinement, her face lighting up with delight at each flutter and kick. She would take his hand, guide it to her ripe belly, and even he had to marvel at the wonder of the life she was carrying.

But there hadn't been only one life, there were two. And now, one of those lives had taken that of his precious wife.

The shame intensified.

What would his Louisa think of his despicable thoughts? Perhaps the real question Andrew Buchanan should've asked that frosty winter dawn was whether he would ever forgive Ivy Elizabeth Buchanan for killing her mother.

Chapter One

Madeline

Sydney, March 2008

'Madeline?'

Madeline Harris turned to see a woman with shoulder-length blonde hair striding purposefully towards her. She wore a power suit, circa 1990, and her coiffed hair was reminiscent of one of those women from the *Real Housewives* franchise—with the slightly orange tinge to her skin she could easily fit in Beverly Hills. The height of her stilettos was certainly straight out of Hollywood.

'Yes, hello.' Madeline smiled politely.

'Sherry Drysdale from Drysdale Real Estate.' She proffered her hand and Madeline shook it. Her handshake was all business, much like her suit. 'Thanks for meeting with me on such short notice.' 'It's not a problem. Follow me, I'll take you through.'

Sherry wasted no time heading into the building, which was nothing special from the outside. A nondescript red-brick boxy tower flanked by a nature strip that had seen better days. The entryway was dim and dark, and a fusty smell clung to the air. A shiver scuttled down Madeline's spine and goose bumps formed on her bare arms. It had been nice and sunny when she left her mother's house earlier so she had forgone taking a jumper.

She hoped that the apartment was more welcoming than the entryway. Not that she had a plethora of choices, really. The alter-native would be to stay with her mother for goodness knows how long. When she left New York, she really hadn't thought past get-ting out and fast.

If she knew for sure it would be short term, then her staying with her mother wouldn't be such a big deal. The thing was Madeline wasn't sure when, or if, she would be going back to New York.

She loved her mum, but she had just spent three days of Carolyn mollycoddling her just because she arrived with a mild cold and even though she knew her gran would welcome her with open arms, Madeline knew that wouldn't go down well with her mum. For reasons Madeline never fully understood, Carolyn and her mother-in-law had always had a tenuous relationship.

So, this really was her one and only option.

'It's top floor,' Sherry threw out over her shoulder as they climbed the stairs. 'But you're young and look fit so it shouldn't pose a problem for you.'

'Ah, yeah.' Despite the fact that she had spent the last eight years virtually walking everywhere, Madeline struggled to keep up with Sherry's pace. The woman seemed to

do everything at high speed. She wouldn't be surprised if Sherry ran no less than ten kilometres every morning.

'Prepare to be wowed.' Sherry flashed a smile as she unlocked the door. 'This place is something else.'

Madeline didn't hold her breath. What she'd seen so far had in no way, to use Sherry's words, wowed her.

But that all changed as soon as the door swung open. Light spilled out and like a moth she was drawn in.

As soon as she stepped inside, she was cocooned by white: antique white to be specific. She knew the differences between the intricacies of the different shades of white thanks to Elise, who lived in the same apartment building in New York.

'What you need is to get rid of these drab hog's bristle walls and paint them antique white,' Elise had declared on her first welcome to the building visit.

Madeline had looked around her apartment wondering how Elise knew the walls, which to Madeline looked like a light tone of beige, were in fact hog's bristle. She had thought the colour to be on trend—well that was until Elise pointed out otherwise.

'You think I should repaint the walls white?'

Elise shook her head. 'No, not just white, antique white,' she emphasised ever so slowly. 'Come up for a drink tomorrow and I'll show you.'

Elise's apartment was ten floors above, and unlike her floor where there were rows and corridors of apartments, on Elise's floor, there were only four. It didn't take long for Madeline to deduce that Elise and her husband David were very well off.

'See,' Elise said as she tenderly stroked the wall as if she were stroking a beloved pet.

'Antique white. It's not as harsh as some other whites, and it has warmth, not frostiness.'

Despite Elise's eccentricities, she ended up becoming one of Madeline's closest friends; she was also the only person other than her boss who knew where she was.

Madeline eyed the walls appreciatively. Elise was right. Antique white had warmth to it.

This morning when Madeline had spied the ad for the one-bedroom apartment online, she'd assumed that the photos were all airbrushed. But in reality, the photos didn't do the place justice. Sure, the kitchen was small, but it was open and had an island, which made it seem larger. The sofa was a pale stone beige with dusty pink and champagne cushions and a chunky dove-grey cable-knit throw. There was a small, pretty whitewashed wooden coffee table made complete with high-end glossy hardback books. Tasteful knick-knacks also adorned the living area.

'Wow.' That was all she could manage. 'Just wow.'

'I told you it was something special,' Sherry said smugly. 'Come out onto the balcony and look at the view.'

The view was indeed as breathtaking as anticipated. Lush green parklands framed the coastline and, in the mid-morning sun, the water shimmered blue with thousands of silver lights twinkling and dancing along the water. It was almost too good to be true.

'Why is this place vacant?' Madeline asked, hoping this wasn't a murder house or something. She really needed some space from her mother. When she jumped aboard a plane on a whim, she hadn't really thought of a plan beyond the first few days, but it'd become apparent that she wouldn't be heading back to New York anytime soon.

After three days of being tended to by Carolyn, she knew that if she stayed on any

longer, her mother would be bringing her cheese toasties cut in triangles like she was ten years old.

'Well, I guess I should be honest with you.' Sherry cleared her throat and gave a nervous laugh. 'I mean, if you move in, you're going to find out from the neighbours anyway.'

Here we go.

Madeline knew it was too good to be true. The walls did look freshly painted. And a good job at that to get rid of all the blood with all the white.

'There have been some reports from previous tenants of paranormal activity.'

'What?' she asked.

Sherry lowered her voice to a conspiratorial whisper. 'Paranormal activity, like you know—'

'Ghosts. Yeah, I know what paranormal activity means. It wasn't what I was expecting.' Madeline was being honest; it really wasn't what she was expecting.

'I know. People generally suspect something like a bitter marriage breakup, a double murder or something mundane like that.' Sherry waved a hand dismissively. 'If only, right?'

'Yeah, if only,' she mumbled feebly. 'So, how is this place haunted?'

'See those ruins along there?' Sherry pointed towards the walkway alongside the river. 'The ruins are part of a number of old asylum buildings—the Bedlam Bay Lunatic Asylum. It only closed some ten years ago; can you believe it?'

'Guess that's why it's called Bedlam Point,' Madeline mused.

'No, actually, Bedlam Point was named so before the asylum, but this whole area—including this block of units—was part of the hospital, which has a pretty dark history. I never had any complaints though, none until the ghost tours started becoming a thing. Now, all of a sudden, people are complaining about doors slamming and lights flickering.'

Sherry obviously thought this all to be a massive inconvenience to her. While the agent's cavalier attitude annoyed her slightly, Madeline was surprised that the idea of paranormal activity didn't bother her so much. She must be desperate to escape her mother's excessive mollycoddling if a haunted house was appealing.

'What's a little light flickering and door slamming? I mean who's to say it's not dodgy electrics or the wind causing it all?'

'Exactly!' Sherry enthused, her eyes lighting up like a Christ-mas tree. 'So, I take it you're interested?'

Madeline shrugged, casually feigning nonchalance. 'Perhaps. If I like the look of the rest of the place and if the price is right.'

'I'm sure we can work something out.' Sherry grinned. 'Now, let's give you the grand tour, shall we?'

True to her word, Sherry did work something out. In the end they agreed on a short lease; apparently it wasn't the standard, but given the delicate nature of the site, an exception to the rule could be made. The apartment being fully furnished was also a nice bonus. Once the paperwork was complete and the deposit paid, she had the keys to her shiny new haunted pad.

Her mother, as expected, wasn't thrilled.

'But I thought you were here only for a short while?' Carolyn frowned. 'When are you due to fly home?'

'When I am ready.'

'And when would that be, you think?' Madeline of course had no answer.

Two days later as she stood on the balcony at dusk, watching as the city lights twinkled against a fast-darkening sky, Madeline felt her phone buzz in her pocket.

When she saw whom the message was from, her stomach flipped.

She prepared and ate dinner then curled up on the couch with a glass of shiraz. She took out her phone—the message still unread. It wasn't the first message she'd received from him. He sent one a few days ago: Sorry.

This text at least had more than a single word: When are you coming home?

Home. Her husband, Evan, was referring to New York. To their apartment in Midtown: a place that held more heart-ache than happiness. There was a time when Evan was the man she turned to, the one to heal her pain, but now he was the cause of it.

Madeline took a sip of wine, savouring the peppery goodness. There was only one thing to do: the same thing she did with Evan's first message.

Delete. She wasn't ready to talk to him; she wasn't ready to talk to anyone.

Would she ever be ready?