

## 201 MAY STREET

### CHAPTER ONE

THE NAME, Lusciandra Green, was fading fast.

Since the day, the blonde-haired girl entered the world the old ladies around a beachside suburb of Sydney, loved watching Lusciandra grow up. After the police forcibly removed Lusciandra from all familiarity, she was about to celebrate her fifteenth birthday by ending it all.

Standing at the fifth girder in from the east end of a bridge in the middle of a beachside suburb of Melbourne many hours from Sydney, Lusciandra waited for the perfect moment. She didn't know or even care about the age of the metal structure she stood on, all she wanted was to feel the constant vibration created by the vehicles speeding past under her feet. Some of the infrequent rumbles sounded light while others were long and deep. The young girl completely ignored the light vibrations. She wanted to feel the long deep rumbles of the fully laden trucks.

Lusciandra would bide her time and wait for the perfect size truck to slip under the other side of the bridge before jumping. The larger the truck, the more certain she felt of a painless death. Dying wasn't her most feared thought, lying flat on her back in agony waiting to draw her last breath made her feel like vomiting.

Lusciandra pushed her long unruly hair from her eyes when she heard a truck beginning to enter the underpass.

The vibration felt too light.

In a split second, Lusciandra decided to watch the vehicle roll away and let the driver off the hook. He would never know how close he came to seeing someone commit suicide.

Lusciandra would be patient a little longer.

At the fifth girder, the maintenance gate remained closed by way of a rusty old padlock. Lusciandra heaved her light frame over the bridge railing, observing the rust stained gate hinges. Standing on the short narrow support beam jutting out of the side of the bridge, she could smell the sea air. Even when a seagull squawked as it flew under the street light; the act couldn't rack up a smile on Lusciandra's pretty young face.

A new round of vibrations gave away another truck was approaching at speed. Waiting to see the vehicle, Lusciandra counted inwardly.

"Five seconds, perfect," she whispered. "The next heavy rumble will be the one. I'll count to three then jump."

Gripping the edge of the railing by one hand, Lusciandra pushed her back against the graffiti splattered steel girder. Some of the older artwork along the metal outside span looked quite good. However, black scribble stole the show hiding part of the main scene. Thinking back over her short fifteen years convinced Lusciandra the only way to stop her pain was to jump.

Lusciandra closed her eyes so she could concentrate on listening out for the deep rumble of the exact size truck she needed. She wanted her death to be instant. At least she could control something. Feeling a truck rumbling under the bridge, Lusciandra started counting. In a heartbeat, she decided the truck might be too light and watched it roll away, the driver totally unaware of the figure standing on the wrong side of the bridge wall waiting to die.

A light drizzle began to fall. It only took a few minutes for the steel railing Lusciandra held to feel wet. Rainwater beaded on the outside of her jumper. Her long hair started clinging to her scalp.

For over five minutes Lusciandra waited for the exact noise she hoped might help to propel her towards the pearly gates.

Turning her back on the large office window, Lusciandra closely studied the woman sitting comfortably in a dull red leather chair behind her desk. At that moment, any hint of an awkward expression would be devastating.

"Do you think I have a good chance to tell my secret?" asked Lusciandra.

Ms. Amanda Daltry nodded at the tall, thin woman. "I'm positive the couple I'm thinking of will be more than happy to write your words down. I can assure you they will write every word in the third person viewpoint just like you've started to tell me."

"In case I relay my life story badly, will the people you're thinking of construct the words in such a way they'll flow suave and not be too boring?"

"You needn't worry. The two authors are experts in their field."

Lusciandra looked out of the window and scrutinized the cars moving past the building in the Melbourne CBD. She finally sighed away any residue of doubt she may have felt, and without looking over her shoulder, she said abruptly.

"I haven't told anyone about what happened."

"I'm happy you returned my invite."

"At first, I decided there was no way I could ever tell my secret. I felt frightened over the fact if no one understood my explanation of events they'd laugh."

"I'm not laughing," insisted Amanda.

Lusciandra marched across the room and sat at the desk. Leaning back in the black leather chair, she stared at Amanda Daltry noting the woman looked friendly. Her mini-skirt and blouse looked impeccable. Lusciandra certainly couldn't detect a wrinkle in the cream coloured top. The woman reeked of business. Her steady smile and natural medium talent lured stories from the many ghosts lining the corridor outside her office.

"How do you feel?" asked Amanda. "Now you've started telling your story I mean?"

"I'm happy," replied Lusciandra.

"I'm glad you finally decided to show yourself."

"After many hours of trying to decide should I tell my life story or not, I know it's the right thing to do. Besides, I think I should tell it in its entirety while I still have time. Amanda, I have lived quite a colourful life. Are you, positive the two authors won't laugh?"

"I can assure you James Buxton and his wife Mia won't laugh. They have already told the tale of Mia's Grandmother Eloise and the murder she planned. I can now divulge it was some secret she kept. After it had been written down, she felt genuinely relieved."

"I don't care for the money or the recognition; I'm hoping my story will help someone else. I don't want to ever hear about a young girl committing suicide or that she had a life like I did."

"I'm certain after reading about your life everyone will want to turn away from the lifestyle you needed to endure. I've only heard a few sentences; already I'm bursting at the seams to hear the whole lot." Amanda Daltry glanced at her watch. "Mia and James Buxton are always on time. They should be stepping out of the lift at the end of the corridor right about now. I recommend you go and introduce yourself. I'll talk to them when they're sitting looking at me."

"Do they know you're secret?" asked Lusciandra.

"No, not yet. Mia and James Buxton will know in about five minutes."

"How do you think they'll react to the news?"

"I'm hoping they will take it in their stride," said Amanda, trying to sound confident.

"What if they don't?"

"I'm not too sure what I'll do. Let's hope they are okay about my secret."

Mia and James Buxton stepped out of the lift in the ten storey ultra modern building. At the end of the corridor, they saw Amanda Daltry's office. Thirty men and the same number of women sat on chairs either side of the corridor. Walking towards Amanda's office, James and Mia stared at each person in turn.

"Why are you here?" asked James, directing his question at a woman halfway between the lift and Amanda's door.

The young woman smiled up at James. When she stood, her long brown hair fell past her shoulders. The woman wore blue jeans and a white-collar shirt. Somehow a breeze started blowing down the corridor making the tips of the woman's hair move ever-so-slightly. Switching her gaze between James and Mia, the woman's eyes shone.

"So, the rumor is true, you can see me?" whispered the woman.

James looked astounded over her comment.

"Of course, we can see you," said Mia. She looked back at the crowd. "Is everyone here to see Amanda Daltry?"

A chorus of yes and I sure am filled the air in the corridor.

Closer to Amanda's office the corridor opened up into a large carpeted room. The young lady receptionist stopped typing and looked over the top of the computer screen when she spied James and Mia.

A different woman stood close to the office door at the end of the corridor. Boasting an inviting smile, she prepared to meet the two new arrivals.

"I'm Lusciandra Green. If I were to guess, I'd have to say you are Mia and James Buxton."

"Yes, we are," replied Mia.

"I love the dark colour of your hair. Each strand shines in the light of the overhead fluorescent tubes," said Lusciandra, making an idle remark.

"Thanks for the compliment."

After watching Mia supposedly talking to herself, the receptionist hid her smirk by sitting directly behind the computer monitor and resuming the morning duties.

"Can I be the first one to tell you my secret before all those people?" asked Lusciandra. She pointed a long finger at the crowd sitting in the corridor.

Mia stepped closer. "What secret are you referring to?"

"The one I have never told."

"Are you here to see Amanda Daltry too?" asked James, gathering his thoughts.

"No. I'm here to tell you and Mia my secret."

"Please excuse us we have an appointment with Amanda," explained James.

"Everyone will be here when you return," advised Lusciandra.

After straightening his suit and tie, James knocked on Amanda Daltry's door. Waiting to hear the 'ENTER' word, James studied the long queue of people in the corridor. They were all smiling and staring at him and Mia. Glancing at Lusciandra Green, he didn't have a chance to continue their puzzling conversation.

"Enter," called Amanda.

For the second time, Mia glanced at the receptionist. The young woman still seemed oblivious to the multitude of people lining the sides of the corridor. Noticing the lift doors opening, Mia watched a dozen more people joining the rear of the long queue. Whisperings from the seated people cemented the fact the new arrivals were in the right place.

"Enter," called Amanda for the second time.

James allowed Mia to step inside the room first. He looked at the crowd sitting in the corridor one last time as he shut the door.

"Come in, sit down, you don't have to be shy."

James whirled around to see Amanda Daltry staring at him. He took hold of Mia's hand and accompanied her across the room. Sitting at the desk, James eyeballed Amanda Daltry suspiciously. To him, the woman never seemed to put on weight. In fact, her stunning looks never changed. Every time James or Mia saw Amanda; she wore a completely different outfit. Six-inch stiletto heels always matched the colour of her blouse. This time around she wore a grey mini-skirt. She never appeared fazed at feeling the material riding high on her thighs. No matter how hard James tried, he could never detect a tan line on Amanda's upper legs. Today her fashionable top looked lower than usual. Getting what she wanted from an author happened to be her specialty.

"Let me start the ball rolling," suggested Amanda. "Your book; 'don't tell my secret' is a massive hit. Congratulations."

"Thanks," said James. Knowing Amanda all too well, he sensed something was brewing and wanted to have his say long before she knew her time had been interrupted. "You do realize Mia, and I, have nearly finished writing another book. Our second honeymoon to the Greek Islands has also netted us pages of titles and ideas. If we don't stop for a break, I reckon we have enough ideas for at least ten years of book writing."

"It's good to hear you two are at the top of your game. I hope you don't mind, I've asked a few people to come along today."

"Are they the ones seated in the corridor?" questioned Mia, pointing at the door.

"Yes, they are."

"Lusciandra mentioned they all have a secret," said James.

"Don't we all," confessed Amanda.

Chuckling nervously, she pushed back in her chair. Hesitating only long enough to batter her long black eyelashes a few times, she stood, strolled across the room and opened the door.

"Lusciandra, please come in."

The woman stepped timidly into the room.

"Hello again," greeted James, standing.

"Same to you," replied Lusciandra.

James and Mia pushed their hand out for a business-like handshake. Instead of conforming to their request, Lusciandra made a flippant hand gesture. The office door slammed shut on the faces of the people sitting in the corridor. James closely watched Lusciandra following Amanda to the desk,

seemingly unperturbed that her mini-skirt was riding high on her thighs. Exactly like Amanda did quite frequently, Lusciandra also seemed too preoccupied to pull the material down.

Amanda sat deep in her chair switching her stare between James and Mia.

"I think we need to know what's going on," insisted James.

"Don't tell my secret was a great success," Amanda advised.

"You've said that," groaned Mia.

"The last time you forced me into writing a romance novel you hitched up your mini-skirt. You've done the same thing today," mentioned James.

"You're very observant," said Amanda.

"You are extremely predictable," grumbled James.

"Did you tell Mia I gave you a French kiss to get what I wanted?"

"Yes, I did. Amanda, the incident happened before Mia, and I met, and it will never happen again. I'm now married."

"Then we both know where we stand."

"You do realize I would have written your precious romance novel without the kiss?" questioned James.

"I suppose I'll have to take your word on that."

Amanda smirked and leaned forward. Placing her elbows on the desktop, she again battered her long black eyelashes at James.

"You both did such a great job in writing the last book I summoned up the people outside to share their secret."

"What do you mean summoned?" quizzed James.

"You're a great author. You've heard the word. You know its meaning."

"Let me make an off the cuff guess. All those people sitting in the corridor are ghosts," James probed.

Amanda nodded slowly.

"You're joking?" questioned Mia.

"Can't you tell she's not?" snarled James. He stood to leave.

"So, you're a medium?" continued Mia.

"Fully fledged and I'm good at it. If you don't believe me count the number of guests sitting in the corridor."

"I've already done that," announced James. "We don't have time to interview them. Mia and I only need a few more weeks, and the first novel we've written together will be ready to go to print."

"Romance in the Greek islands," interrupted Amanda. "Let me be the first to say it'll probably be another smashing success."

"Spare us the flattery. We want to finish it."

"Maybe we should put it on hold," suggested Mia. "We could set it aside for six months, write the secrets of a couple of people in the queue then get back to our novel."

Lusciandra floated a few inches above the floor. "Please don't blame Amanda. She summoned us all and explained we have a choice whether we want to tell our story or not. She made a point in saying it's our choice. I have to add, I want to. I've heard all about your last novel; impressive plot. Writing the novel in the third person while it's dictated to you in its entirety is a unique talent to own. Please agree to write my life story."

"How interesting is it?" asked Mia.

"It's extremely suspenseful. I thought up a title while waiting for you two."

Mia switched her stare to Amanda Daltry.

"James and I would like a few minutes to discuss the idea."

"Yes, certainly," Amanda replied.

James folded his arms and watched Lusciandra and Amanda walk across the room. He saw Amanda open the door and close it behind them.

James wasted no time in grabbing Mia by the arm. "We can't do this."

"And why not?" she asked.

"There are seventy-two people out in the corridor."

"Yes, I know. I counted them. James, each one has got a right to tell his or her story."

"They're all ghosts," moaned James. "Where there are seventy-two there might be, thousands waiting in the wings. We both saw another twelve join the queue."

"I must admit seeing dead people sitting in chairs, is a tad unnerving."

"Just a bit!" shrieked James.

"It might be fun hearing their stories. If you think about the idea in more detail, you'll realize the stories will be true. Don't tell my secret was a good start to a series."

"A very long series," added James. "When will we get a chance to finish writing all our novels? The plots we thought up on our honeymoon sound great?"

"Why don't we place them on hold? We've written the first draft of at least ten future novels. They aren't going anywhere."

James finally relented by exhaling his tension. "I suppose you're right. We can always finish them when we get a chance."

"Exactly," whispered Mia.

"If we do this we should lay down some important rules."

"What sort of rules?" asked Mia.

"For one thing, I don't want to be woken by a ghost too early in the morning. What happens if one materializes while we're making love?"

"You have a point. James, don't look so upset. It'll be fine. Where's your sense of adventure?"

James walked across the room to the window opposite Amanda's desk. Pushing his hands deep into his pockets, he looked lost in a fantasy world of characters and plots. Mia strolled up behind him. Slipping around him so she could block his view of the Melbourne CBD she craned her neck and kissed him.

After sending Mia a loving smile, James responded evenly.

"I suppose we have nothing to lose. I only hope the group outside will understand they might be waiting to tell their story for a long time?"

"I'm sure they would have thought it through already," hinted Mia. "Do you agree?"

"Yes, provided we can add the few clauses I've already mentioned," said James. "You never know it might be entertaining to hear the life story of a ghost."

Mia marched across the floor and opened the door. "James and I have reached a compromise."

Amanda unfolded her arms. "Lusciandra and I will hear it after we've re-entered my office."

Lusciandra floated into the room and stood behind Amanda Daltry, sitting at her desk.

"What have you decided?" asked Amanda. Switching her gaze between James and Mia she tried to ascertain exactly what they might have discussed.

"We'll do it provided we add a few clauses," warned James.

"I don't like the sound of where this is going," moaned Lusciandra.

"I don't either," echoed Amanda. "I expect my authors to give readers and their publicist what they want. I know your last novel is selling extremely fast. It pains me to make a decision to sweep such a good team out of here."

"You would get rid of us without a second thought?" questioned Mia.

"Yes," replied Amanda. "I'm positive there are authors right now walking the streets of Melbourne who'd accept my offer. I can imagine them sitting at a café just like James does, watching people going about their daily affairs hoping to discover inspiration to write a best-selling novel. If they viewed me strolling into the café, order a latte and carry it to their table, I'm more than positive they'd buy me another drink if I asked them to consider the same request as I'm asking of you two."

"I can understand where you're coming from," snarled James. "Receive what I'm about to say, any, way, you like. You more than live up to the emotionless premeditated reputation authors have labeled you."

"Who would say such a thing?"

"All the other authors who work in this establishment," stated James.

"I haven't heard a single word out of place."

"So, you haven't heard the latest rumor?" questioned James.

"Enlighten me," grumbled Amanda.

"Last week you dated a young man looking for a break into this agency. Amanda, he was only twenty-two."

"He's an adult. I'm only double his age."

"And a bit more," argued James.

"For your information, James Buxton, he wanted to take me to a nice hotel for the night. If it's any of your business and I must stress it's not, I refused his offer. I gave him a massive long French kiss, tapped him playfully on the side of his cheek and walked off into the night."

"I take it he said no to type up a story dictated by a ghost?" quizzed Mia.

"Exactly," replied Amanda. "He stipulated he has ideas of his own and wants to keep it that way."

“Getting back to the same proposal,” hinted Mia. “James and I have to admit we are a little concerned Lusciandra or any of the other ghosts sitting in the corridor might pop into our house, unannounced, invading our privacy.”

“I’d never do anything which might embarrass either of you,” insisted Lusciandra.

“There has to be a happy ending,” mentioned James.

“Of course,” said Lusciandra.

“How can there be, you’re dead,” growled James.

“I’m not a permanent guest of the hereafter,” stated Lusciandra.

Pushing her chair back away from the desk, Amanda stood to full height. James Buxton stood an even six feet. In her six-inch-high heels, Amanda appeared to be a smidgeon taller. She strolled over to the window directly behind her desk. In the background, the Port of Melbourne looked to be a hive of activity. A cargo ship full to the rivets with shipping containers had slipped under the tall Westgate Bridge. Soon the massive overhead cranes will begin to unload the ship then fill it again.

Amanda’s breasts creased her shirt and strained against the buttons as she inhaled. A moment later she exhaled her temper, turned her back to the window and deliberately squared herself to Mia and James. Looking through Lusciandra’s semi-transparent image, Amanda smiled.

“James Buxton, please control your temper,” instructed Amanda. “This is a big thing. I had to think carefully about who might appreciate our guests sitting in the corridor.”

“I’m sorry the ghosts are so sensitive.”

Mia nudged James in the ribs.

James lifted his hands into the air. “I apologize for my conduct.”

“I can understand your lack of enthusiasm in wanting to help,” interrupted Lusciandra. “Seeing ghosts is slightly unusual.”

“Are there any more clauses that are troubling you?” grilled Amanda.

“Typing up everyone’s story will take some time,” instructed James.

“The ghosts sitting in the corridor have nothing else to do,” explained Lusciandra.

For the first time, James and Mia smiled.

“Then you’ll do it?” asked Lusciandra.

“Yes, we will,” announced Mia.

“You’ll agree to write and edit my story until it flows perfectly?” quizzed Lusciandra.

James said seriously. “Yes, we will. Please, tell us.”

“Thank you!” shrieked Lusciandra. “I wish I could give both of you a massive hug.”

“Do you want to begin by telling us the title?” asked James.

“I’ve called it 201 May Street,” said Lusciandra.

“Interesting,” admitted Mia.

“I can swing past your house this morning,” mentioned Lusciandra.

“Do you know where we live?”

“Yes of course; Melbourne side of Mt. Martha. You own the house on top of the cliff. It has a lift from the garage and your bedroom window overlooks Port Phillip Bay. James, you drive a BMW sports car. You bought Mia the matching pair.”

“I guess we’ll be expecting you at nine thirty this morning,” said James.