

CHAPTER ONE

AMY HAD NEVER DELIBERATELY kept anything from the boy she loved, and that knowledge scraped her conscience raw as the train slowed into the brightly lit station. It didn't matter that she and Flynn weren't dating. He was her longest and closest friend, and he didn't deserve to be lied to.

To make matters worse, he wasn't the only one. As far as Amy's mum knew, she was doing an assignment with her friend Leona. That part, at least, was true. A *research experiment* was how Leona had spun it; the chance to prove an urban legend true.

What they were really doing, though, was conducting a seance in a haunted train tunnel in the middle of the night in a dodgy Melbourne suburb. Something Valerie Shipley would be worried sick over if she knew that was what her daughter was up to, and as for Flynn... well, there was more than one reason Amy hadn't told him.

Hefting her backpack onto one shoulder, she pushed the guilt from her mind as she concealed her blonde hair with the hood of

her sweatshirt and stepped from the train with confidence she didn't possess.

The platform was deserted, save for a couple of policemen who eyed their little group with interest. She supposed the four of them looked as though they were up to no good, dressed entirely in black with their hoods up. It wasn't even cold enough to be wearing sweats.

Amy dropped her head, determined not to make eye contact, but she could tell they were staring as she passed. Was it obvious what they were planning to do?

Ahead of her, the others had already pushed through the ticket gates and were walking towards the overpass. A pent up breath escaped her lips as she reached for her railcard.

'You okay, Ames?'

Luka's warm brown eyes reached out to her from beneath his hoodie.

'Yeah.' She nodded, grateful that at least one of them had waited for her while cursing under her breath that it wasn't Flynn. It *should* have been Flynn. If he'd been with them tonight, there was no way he'd have left her walking alone.

But she hadn't wanted to tell him about the seance. Flynn didn't believe in anything paranormal and would have only tried to talk her out of going. So what if she deliberately neglected to mention it? Besides, he hadn't even bothered to show up at school today. It wasn't like he made it easy for her to tell him.

His loss.

Taking his best friend's outstretched hand, they ran to catch up to Leona and Kenzie, who were already waiting down on street

level. Pausing at the top of the stairs, Luka turned to her, his eyebrows raised. ‘Race you.’

Amy grinned back as she saddled a handrail, thankful that she’d worn slick leggings. Sliding down the two flights to the bottom, her feet hit the concrete a full second before Luka’s. She fist-pumped the air. ‘Burn, boy!’

He shook his head and moved to sling an arm around her shoulder. ‘You got lucky.’

She shoved him off her, but then linked her arm through his. Her body had been tight with tension and she felt so much better for having let off a bit of steam. Luka was always good at that. But then he went and ruined it.

‘Try to ignore the meth-heads,’ he warned, as the girls clutched at each other and speed-walked down the darkened street.

Amy’s heart pounded the entire time, but it only took a few minutes to reach the junction at the bottom of Bunbury Street. Here, the road sloped down towards the banks of the river, and the railway tracks leading from the bridge in front of them disappeared through a tunnel beneath their feet. The tunnel, that was purported to be haunted by the ghost of Elodie Mitchell.

Amy looked at the signal lights down by the tunnel entrance. Both were glowing red, and she couldn’t recall if that meant the tracks were busy or clear. The tracks ahead were quiet, but fear tumbled in her belly. What if a train came while they were in the tunnel? This wasn’t Leona’s smartest idea. Surely, no school assignment was worth risking their lives?

A flash of light swept over them as a lone car turned the bend, its headlights illuminating a large grinning skull made from discarded CDs that adorned the safety barricade to the tracks

below. Amy shuddered as she caught sight of the words fashioned beneath it before the darkness swallowed them again. VITA BREVIS. *Life is short.*

Gripping her backpack, she peered over the ledge. Elodie Mitchell's life had been cut short the moment she fell down there twenty years ago. Perhaps that's why the skull was there. Like a reminder. A modern-day memento mori.

Whatever the reason, Leona was attempting to raise Elodie's ghost tonight, and she was already skipping down the street, trailing her nails across the red-bricked siding of the tunnel wall as she went. 'Come on, let's go.'

About halfway down the street, the wall dipped low enough to gain access onto the tracks before rising again to meet the bridge.

Leona stopped and stabbed Luka in the chest. 'You. Watch out for weirdos and security guards.'

'Shouldn't I be watching for trains?' he asked, giving her and Kenzie a leg up, before climbing up himself. He smirked at Amy. 'Need a hand?'

She glared at him, hands on hips. 'I think you need to stand back.'

He raised his hands in acquiescence and obeyed. Amy tossed him her backpack before backing up a few steps. Then, blowing out a breath, she bounced on the balls of her feet and ran straight towards the wall. Planting her hands atop the brick, she sprang up to meet Luka in one fluid movement. He slapped her palm with a high-five.

'Your parkour training is paying off.'

It was hands-down one of her best moves, and although Flynn had been stopping by her gym class of late, she still wished he'd

been there to see it too. But of course, that would mean that she would've had to tell him all about the seance that she was deliberately *not* telling him about.

'Will you two hurry up?' Leona's voice rang out of the darkened tunnel ahead.

She and Kenzie had completely disappeared into the gaping maw and Amy wondered, not for the first time, why they couldn't hold the seance in the daylight. But Leona had been adamant. It had to be done as close to the time of Elodie's death as possible. *For authenticity.*

Dramatic much? Maybe they should've invited Flynn. He could've filmed the whole thing for his media class.

Amy turned and peered at the bridge behind them. It was still quiet, but she didn't know which was freaking her out the most: seeing a ghost or getting hit by a train. Anxiety made her tummy clench.

Eager to get this over with, she marched into the blackness. 'Where are we doing this?' Her voice echoed off the brick. Stopping under the expansive void that Elodie fell through, she looked up. 'Hey, isn't this where—'

'Not there,' Leona retorted. 'I don't want junkies throwing needles and beer cans down on us.'

Luka appeared beside Amy and whispered in her ear. 'You know this area's not that bad, still, she makes a fair point.'

Amy jerked her head back. 'You know you just contradicted yourself, right?'

Luka spread his arms wide with a smile to match. 'Then call me an oxymoron.'

Despite her best efforts, Amy snorted, then burst out laughing.

‘What’s so funny?’ Kenzie called from about twenty feet away. She was lighting a circle of tea candles on one of the tracks. Amy frowned. Leona was taking this séance thing too far. Did they actually need all this crap?

‘Nothing,’ she murmured, watching the flames flicker and settle into a steady glow. ‘Luka’s just being... Luka.’

Kenzie nodded, but Amy sensed her stiffness. It was no secret that Kenz adored Luka, yet the guy seemed totally oblivious. Amy stepped over to her and laid a hand on her shoulder, knowing just how she felt.

‘Remember what to do, girls?’

A clatter of stones halted Leona’s pep talk and all three snapped their attention towards the tunnel mouth to find Luka throwing handfuls of gravel at the wall.

‘What the fuck, Luka! You’re supposed to be keeping watch. How old are you, three?’

His face paled as Leona spat something in Mandarin. Amy’s lips twitched. The poor guy. Leona was bound to curse his penis to shrivel up, or something equally as bad. She was all bark and no bite, yet she scared the boys shitless.

‘Can we get this ghost party started?’ Kenzie puffed out an irritable sigh.

With a scathing glance at Luka, Leona set her phone to record a video and placed it face-up on the track between the candles. Her plan involved them linking hands and calling for Elodie’s ghost three times, like summoning Bloody Mary at a tween sleepover.

Except none of Amy’s sleepovers had ever been like that, and she didn’t know what to expect. Taking a shaky breath, she closed

her eyes as Leona began the chant they'd been rehearsing all week.

‘Elodie, Elodie, sing for us a melody. Make yourself heard.’

Amy held her breath, listening hard, but heard nothing but her own pulse beating loud in her ears. This was a complete waste of time. She should be curled up in bed asleep right now and dreaming of Flynn, instead of standing in the middle of some godforsaken freight tunnel. Something—most likely a moth—whizzed by her ear, making her flinch. As she turned her head, she caught the faintest rumble coming from deep inside the tunnel.

Chest constricting, she strained to hear over Kenzie's chant of ‘Elodie, Elodie, sing for us a melody. Make yourself seen.’

With a pounding heart, Amy couldn't help turning her head toward the approaching sound. Even with her eyes shut, light was turning the backs of her eyelids red—light, which was now accompanied by the sound of squealing iron wheels and firing pistons.

Oh, crap.

Leona's hand squeezed hers, as Amy tried to pull away, but Leona's grip was like a vice. Panicked, she blurted her own line. ‘Elodie, Elodie, sing for us a melody. Make yourself whole.’

Hit with a rush of air, she opened her eyes to two white lights boring down on them—a freight train approaching from the far end of the tunnel. It was too dark to tell which track it was on, because the candle flames had snuffed out.

‘Move!’ Luka's voice exploded behind them. Startled, Amy launched towards him as he sprinted toward her.

Dim blue light spilled through the void in the roof where Elodie had fallen, and Amy ran towards it, her only thoughts on escaping

the tunnel. Pressure was building in both ears and pain exploded in her head as they popped. She screamed, as everything turned white.

‘Get back!’

Luka’s hands were on her shoulders, his voice muffled as if he were talking underwater. Then next thing she knew, she was body-slammed back against the bricks, mere seconds before a second freighter rocketed past on the very track where she’d been standing. Instinct kicked in, her palms bracing behind her, but it didn’t stop her head from ricocheting off the wall and cracking against Luka’s jaw.

Pain splintered across her skull as she tried to make sense of what just happened. Over Luka’s shoulder, the freight cars continued to flash by; the dim light from above causing an odd strobing effect. In the dark spaces between each rail car, something was manifesting. A figure. She squinted. *Elodie?*

‘Ames.’ Luka was breathing hard. He shifted back a step, his thick tumble of brown curls obscuring her view. ‘Are you okay?’ Worry swam in his eyes and pulled at his brows.

She nodded, wincing. ‘I know how to fall, remember?’

‘Thank fuck. Flynn would rip me a new one if anything happened to you.’

‘What?’

‘Nothing,’ he grumbled, rubbing at his jaw.

‘Holy shit!’ Leona’s voice reached Amy before her body did. ‘Are you out of your freaking mind?’ Her friend’s arms wrapped around her in a tight hug. ‘I thought you were a goner. That train came from out of nowhere.’

‘Tell me about it,’ Luka said. ‘We better haul arse out of here before we get busted.’

Leona waved her phone in the air. ‘Well, ghost, or no ghost, this footage is going to be awesome.’

‘Do you think it was Elodie?’

Amy swung around to face Kenzie. Had she seen the ghostly girl, too? ‘What do you mean?’ she asked.

‘The train. The second one.’ Kenzie looked to be on the verge of tears, her green eyes huge and shimmering. ‘Do you think she sent it?’

Amy put her arm around her friend’s shoulder. ‘No, Kenz. I’m sure it wasn’t her.’ She flicked a glance at Luka, who stared back, unmoving. ‘Let’s go home.’

The walk back to the train station was silent, except for Leona replaying the video over and over on her phone, trying to see if they captured any paranormal activity. Amy wasn’t interested. It only proved to remind her of what she’d done tonight.

Lied to her mum. Kept a secret from Flynn. Risked her life.

And for what? Some creepypasta footage of them almost getting hit by not one, but *two trains*?

She boarded the Metro with a sigh. The carriage was empty, so they all grabbed their own seats. Close enough together, but far enough apart to get lost in their own thoughts.

Amy only had to travel one stop, yet she stretched out, exhausted, and struggled not to think of what might’ve happened if Flynn had been there to rescue her instead of Luka. Would he have taken her in his arms? Maybe even kissed her?

Heat crept up her neck. Ever since the day she’d met the tall skater-boy-next-door, she’d fallen for him. Hard.

It had been back at the start of the year, in the middle of summer, and one of those scorching hot days when the sun beat down on your back, making you lose your shit over the tiniest things. It didn't help that she and her mum had been moving yet again. This would've been their sixth home in the four years since her dad had left. And she'd liked their last flat—unlike this dump—but they hadn't been able to afford the rent increase, and so there they were dragging their belongings up two flights of concrete stairs. Again.

Amy hadn't even reached the second half of the stairwell when the crappy plastic wheels on her suitcase had snapped off. She'd watched helpless, as they rolled over the edge and clattered onto the weed-encrusted concrete below. She was already hot, tired, and sore. Determined not to cry, she'd sat down and pressed the heels of her palms into her eyes. Once she'd pulled herself together, she'd noticed a boy sitting on the retaining wall beside the drive.

Partly camouflaged by the shade of the trees, he was watching her, all the while rolling a skateboard back and forth under his feet. She'd stared back as he got up and retrieved the broken wheels, climbed the stairs, and handed them to her in his open palm.

She still remembered the feel of his skin when it brushed hers. Warm, with long, strong fingers.

'Unit six, right?' he'd asked. Deep ocean-blue eyes looked straight at her through a scrappy black fringe.

So captivated by his open gaze, she'd barely noticed the heat from the concrete step searing through the back of her denim shorts. He'd picked up her bag as if it weighed nothing, and carried it to her front door. When she found the sense to get to her feet and thank him, he'd shrugged it off.

‘If you need anything, I’m next door. Number five.’ Jerking a thumb over his shoulder, he’d turned away. Amy’s heart had been pounding so hard, she hadn’t even thought to ask his name.

That had been ten months ago. And even though she and her mum had moved to yet another apartment, those dark blue eyes still watched her with equal parts amusement and intensity. She still ached to run her hands through that messy black hair. And oh God, don’t get her started on his lopsided grin that she longed to see every day and dreamed of kissing every night.

Amy blinked. In the darkened carriage window, her reflection was pink and glistening. She wasn’t sure if it was the night’s excitement or thoughts of Flynn that made her cheeks so flushed. She twisted away to grab her backpack as the train slowed into South Kensington and caught Luka watching her with a thoughtful expression.

‘Do you think Flynn will be at school tomorrow?’ she asked him.

He shrugged, twisting his hair into a messy bun. ‘With him, who knows?’

Amy nodded. Flynn had bunked off again this week, and now that she was no longer living next door, she never knew when she’d see him next. She still worried about his mum’s boyfriend. The guy was a complete arsehole and liked to push Flynn around, even though he was more than capable of looking after himself these days. Her cheeks heated. The boy had grown into his body rather well over the past few months.

Warmth spread low in her belly as she thought about his muscular arms and gentle hands. Despite his rough upbringing, Flynn Powell was the kindest and most caring person she knew.

Yeah, there was a pretty good chance he would have comforted her tonight. *Damn it.*

Saying her goodbyes, Amy stepped from the carriage and quickened her pace through the darkened park to her housing complex. She needed to get home before her mum finished her baking shift at one in the morning and realised Amy wasn't where she said she'd be. Still, she slowed as she passed the playground across the road. She and Flynn often hung out there whenever he walked her home, but tonight the swings were empty.

How many more nights were they going to have together? Their senior year was almost over. She couldn't let him slip away.

Vita Brevis. Life was too short, and so she made a resolution.

Tomorrow night, after gym class. There, on the swings in the dark. That's when she'd tell Flynn how she felt.