

Chapter One

Ava Remmer couldn't believe what she was seeing. The whole thing must be some sort of scam.

Seated in the waiting room, she knew she couldn't afford a place like this. Why had they so eagerly agreed to her terms? There had only been a pinprick of doubt before she had boarded the plane from Los Angeles, but now the alarm bells were well and truly ringing.

SYDNEY CONSULTING AND MANAGEMENT SERVICES. The company name proudly displayed across the reception desk had caught her attention and Ava felt her concern ease a little as she realised the source of her anguish. The acronym.

SCAMS.

With nervous fingers, she picked up her cell phone and flicked through her emails again, looking for confirmation in writing that they had agreed on a price.

Yep, there it was. The email that had, at the time, made her jump around her living room floor in pure delight, pumping the air as if on a sports field. Ava - the team captain, club president and fanatical fan - all in one. She had felt blissfully validated that someone other than herself thought her idea was plausible. That delectable email that had been the catalyst for her selling up her entire life in Los Angeles, leave a steady job and fly to Sydney, Australia in a mad rush of blind faith.

Ava glanced up at the reception desk for some reassurance from the lady with trendy red hair and designer glasses that were an uncanny match. She didn't need much. Just a smile, a raised eyebrow, a snarl even. But the woman refused to make eye contact with her, as if she sensed a massacre and didn't want to be emotionally involved.

SYTYCW Editor Critique:

I definitely wanted to keep reading after I finished this first page! I was intrigued by the heroine's situation and wanted to know more about the (seemingly sketchy) offer that made her give up everything. I liked the subtle touches of humor—the acronym SCAMS and the secretary's deadpan expression at the end. Though I found the page compelling overall, the first line is not the strongest opener. Instead of using a common phrase like "[she] couldn't believe this was happening," how can you show us Ava's anxiety and disbelief with concrete details? What, exactly, is she seeing? There were some nice visual descriptions in this submission, such as the secretary's matching hair and glasses, but providing even more would help draw the reader into the scene. When Ava thinks that she could never afford "this place," what does that mean? What is it about the room that makes her feel out of her depth? Withholding some key details in the beginning of a story is great for building tension, but there's a delicate balance between hooking your reader and confusing her. We don't need to find out everything about Ava and why she's in this waiting room on page one, but giving the reader a slightly more specific indication of what

she's doing there (i.e. waiting for a job interview? about to sign some papers for a big purchase?) could help tighten up the scene. Finally, I loved the last line! It gave us a hint that something's about to go terribly wrong without hitting us over the head with it—almost like the calm before a storm. You might consider playing around with the placement of that sentence. What would happen if it kicked off the story?