

## CHAPTER 1

*Tonya*

THE HEADLINE jumps out and hits me.

*TEENAGER MISSING.*

Maria Davenport. She's pretty, no question about that. Oval face, a tad too much make-up maybe, but this is no ordinary everyday snapshot; it's a special occasion photo-shoot judging by the pose and the quality of the picture. Long dark curls, wide eyes, finely drawn eyebrows, a single tiny mole high on her left cheek, notable in an otherwise flawless skin.

The picture blurs ... dark circles hollow out those luminous eyes, the cheeks and nose are etched into sharper angles, the expression becomes pinched. The shrinkage tells its own tale; a tale that haunts me daily.

I give myself a mental shake. Start again, Tonya. Concentrate on *this* girl. *This* girl is no one you know, d'you hear me? She's just some random kid who's missing. Probably had a row at home. Probably already regretting storming out. Probably crawling back home with her tail between her legs as we speak, surprised at all the fuss she's created.

*'Maria Davenport, sixteen years old'* ... still a schoolgirl ... mere months older than my India.

*'Last seen walking alone along a canal path'* after an uneventful Thursday at school. Six days ago. Has she done this sort of thing before? Did the parents assume she was with friends over the weekend? Have they only just reported her missing? Why?