



## CHAPTER 1

"BETTER SAFE THAN ..."

It had been a good night. Sally Greaves said goodbye to her friends and opened the door out of the youth club. She gasped as a gust of cold wind stung her cheeks. It was freezing. She looked up and down the high street, watching the cars race by, their exhausts billowing in the air behind them. Dad always told her to walk home along the main road, beneath the yellow glare of the street lamps.

"Better safe than sorry," he'd say.

That was all well and good, but walking back via the high street would add a quarter of an hour to

her journey. In this cold. If she nipped around the back of the club, jumped over the wall and walked up the lane, she would be home in no time.

Sally zipped her coat up to her chin. Her mind was made up. Besides, Dad would never know. Shoving her hands into her pockets, she hurried down the steps and turned into the narrow alley that ran beside the youth club. She was already thinking about one of her mum's world-famous hot chocolates. That would warm her up.

The alley was gloomy, lit only by light that spilled from the youth club's grimy windows. Someone should clean those, she thought, although she'd never suggest it. They'd have her outside with a bucket of soapy water in a flash. Better to keep quiet. Besides, she didn't need much light. She'd been playing around here since she was a kid.

Crossing the small courtyard at the back of the club, Sally climbed on top of the big, yellow bin in the corner and hopped over the wall. The

lane was even darker. Too dark. Sally paused for a moment, regretting her decision. Perhaps this wasn't such a good idea. She considered scrambling back into the courtyard before shaking her head.

*What are you like?* she scolded herself. *Afraid of the dark? You're not a kid!*

Taking a deep breath, she started forwards, striding purposefully past the garages that lined the right-hand side of the lane. She was just being silly. Nothing would happen to her. She was safe. Although she did speed up as she passed the murky little corridors that ran between the garages.

Better safe than...

There was a noise from behind. Running feet, heading towards her. Sally span around, her trainers scraping on the gravel. Her eyes were wide and her heart was beating hard in her chest. Was someone there?

No. The lane was empty. Sally took a step back, her hands screwed up into fists in her coat pockets. She waited, but nothing moved in front of her. It must have been noise travelling from the next street. One of the other kids heading home from the club. Even so, it had spooked her enough to change her mind. Dad was right. She'd head home along the main road, under the street lamps. Where she could see things clearly. Where she could be seen. There was a turning back onto the high street further on down the lane. She'd come out by the shops. Might even get some chips.

Sally turned back the way she had been heading and screamed as a hand grabbed her arm.