



'HEY, WHERE'S THE dining-room gone?' Neil Atkinson, first down in jeans and sneakers, paused in the doorway. Tables and carpet had disappeared. Chairs had been moved back against the walls. Heavy curtains blacked out all the windows. Coloured lights flashed red, then blue, then green, striking sparks from the parquet, leaving corners in shadow. The place looked twice as big as before. At one end, between stacked speakers, a girl stood behind a double-deck. She twitched and writhed as Madonna belted out a number so loud you felt it through your feet.

'Wow!' Sarah-Jane, made-up and dressed to kill, went on tiptoe to peer over the boy's shoulder. 'It's brilliant – like a real disco. What we waiting for?'

They walked out on to the floor, fitting their movements into the beat, beginning to dance. The girl at the deck smiled as her blue face turned to green. Others followed, spilling on to the floor in their finery with grins and exclamations.

It grew hot as record followed record, rising and falling on the twin-deck in unbroken series. The three teachers sat together way back in shadow and watched. Now and then, somebody would go over and try to get them to dance, but they wouldn't. 'My dancing days are over,' they'd say, or, 'I'm waiting for

Buddy Holly.' When the break came at eight, everybody was ready for it.

Fliss managed to get the other three in a corner together. Gary had worked up a sweat. His hair was stuck to his forehead. He slurped Coke as she told them what she'd worked out. When she'd finished, he said, 'So what you're saying is, we go in there where he is, and all we've got is a torch, a pebble, a stick of rock and a knackered kite, right?'

Fliss nodded.

'Well, I don't fancy it, I can tell you that.'

'Who does, but have you got a better idea?'

'Sure. We go to bed tonight like everybody else and forget it.'

'And what about Ellie-May? Not to mention all the other kids he's

enticed into that cupboard, and all those he will in future if we don't do something about it.'

'It's got nothing to do with us, has it? We've done our best. We tried to tell the teachers but they wouldn't listen. What I mean is, here we are at this disco, right? And everybody's really enjoying it except us. It's been the same all week. Everybody else has been on holiday, but we've been in the middle of a nightmare. Why us, Fliss? Tell me that.'

Fliss shrugged. 'I can't. I don't know why us, Gary, except we've been picked out somehow. You bought that rock and spent three days sucking it to a point. You're part of the team.'

'Big deal.'

She looked him in the eye. 'We can't do it without you, Gary. It needs four. Four things, four people. Are you chickening out?'

He shook his head, looking at the floor. 'I don't suppose so. It's not fair, that's all I'm saying.'

'You'll be there though, at half-eleven?'

'Yes.'

The second half kicked off with the new Bros album. They danced together, the four of them, a little apart from the others. Gary was right, of course. Deep down, each of them felt as he did – that they'd been unfairly singled out. They'd do what had to be done, but their week had been ruined and that was that. They moved mechanically to the music and thought about midnight.

The end came too soon for everybody, except perhaps the teachers, who had sat it all out, waiting in vain for Buddy Holly. At half-past nine the last track faded, the lights came on and the enchantment melted away. Children stood on the scuffed, littered floor, exposed, self-conscious and tired. Mr Hepworth led three cheers and a round of applause for the disc jockey, who grinned, blushed and looked at her feet. After that, they collected jackets, bags and cardigans and went away to bed.

Mrs Evans stuck her head round the door just as Fliss was taking her shoes off. 'Can I see you out here a minute, please, Felicity?'

Fliss sighed, re-tying the laces. 'What's up now, I wonder?'

'You're in bother,' said Marie, cheerfully. She was already in bed. The twins hadn't finished in the bathroom yet.

Fliss went out on to the landing. Mrs Evans had Lisa there too. She spoke quietly to them both.

'Now listen. I know you're both worried about Ellie-May Sunderland, but you needn't worry any more. She's been fine today, but anyway Mrs Marriott and I have decided to take her into our room for the night, just in case she decides to go sleepwalking again. Mr Hepworth is speaking to Gary and David, and we want you all in bed and asleep before the clock strikes ten. Is that clear?'

'Yes, Miss.'

The disco had shattered everybody, and by the time the faraway clock struck ten Marie and the twins were fast asleep. Fliss lay stroking her pebble, wishing she could sleep too. She could have, easily, but she knew if she did she wouldn't wake up till morning.

So. Ellie-May won't be coming. That doesn't mean the room out there won't change though – wish it did. What about the others? Mr Hepworth's spoken to Trot and Gary. They know Ellie-May's being guarded. Will it stop them coming? Gary wasn't too keen to begin with. And if they don't come, what do we do, Lisa and me? Shine the torch in his eyes and hit him with the pebble, or call it off and let him go on lur-

ing kids to their doom? And anyway, who says Lisa's going to show up?

Good way to keep awake, worrying like this. Every quarter that clock chimes, but it seems like hours between. Ten fifteen. Ten thirty. Ten forty flipping five. Forty-five minutes to go.

Then what?