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Purple

'Ellie's completely changed since she started going to Purple!' Mandy said breathlessly. 'She says it's the most fantastic club there's ever been, and the DJ's brilliant! She wants to take us next time!'

All six members of SPLAT were sitting in Ian's lounge, drinking milk shakes. Mandy looked round at them, her face pink and eager.

'Well?' she said. 'Shall we go?'

How can a club be that great? thought Dinah. She didn't know Mandy's cousin Ellie, but she knew Mandy very well. And it took a lot to get her so excited. Was it really worth going to this Purple thing—whatever it was? Dinah glanced at the other four, to see what they were thinking.

Lloyd and Harvey—her two adopted brothers—had quite different expressions. Harvey was beaming, but Lloyd looked cautious. He wouldn't give a lead until he knew what everyone thought.

Ingrid was grinning and blowing bubbles down her straw. 'Let's make it a SPLAT outing! On Wednesday. That's the next Under Eighteens night, isn't it?'

Lloyd nodded, but he was still being cautious. He looked at Ian. 'What do you think?'

Ian leaned back in his chair, stretching out his long legs. 'I'm not *desperately* keen,' he drawled. 'But I'll go along with the rest of you, of course, if that's what we're doing.'

Lloyd was counting heads. 'We've got three in favour—Mandy and Harvey and Ingrid—and two of us who aren't sure. What about you, Di? Fancy a visit to Purple?'

Dinah frowned. 'I don't know anything about it. What's it like? Are all the walls purple, or something?'

'Of course not!' Ingrid said scornfully.

'So why is it called Purple?' said Dinah.

Shut up! Lloyd and Harvey both pulled faces at Dinah. *Don't be embarrassing!* But once Dinah started asking questions about something, she went on until she understood.

'Do you have to wear purple to get in?' she said.

Lloyd sighed and Harvey put his hands over his face.

'Where do you *live*? In a box?' Ingrid rolled her eyes up at the ceiling. 'Purple's been all over the television for weeks. In every magazine. Plastered across the newspapers. There are clubs opening up everywhere.'

Dinah shrugged. 'Well, I've been busy. There's lots of new research coming out about the socio-biology of feelings and facial expression—'

All the others groaned, and Lloyd threw a cushion at her to make her shut up.

'Who cares about science?' Ingrid growled.

Mandy reached over and patted her shoulder. 'Calm down, Ing. You can't expect a genius like Di to be interested in clubs.'

'Don't see why not,' Ingrid muttered. 'I thought science was about the real world. Purple's part of that. We've got to know about it!'

'She's right, Di.' Lloyd nodded, making up his mind. 'I vote for checking it out—and that makes four in favour. We'll have a SPLAT outing on Wednesday.'

'Fine,' said Dinah.

She wasn't going to argue any more now they'd voted. She might not care much about clubs, but SPLAT meant a lot to her. The Society for the Protection of our Lives Against Them. They were her best friends in the world and the six of them had been through a lot together. Battling against the sinister Headmaster and his plans to control the world had led them into all kinds of problems and dangers and they knew they could rely on one another.

They were SPLAT and they stuck together.

'What time do we leave on Wednesday?' she said.

Mandy beamed. 'It starts at half past seven. But we'll need to be there just after six to get in. Ellie said there was a massive queue last week.'

'OK,' Lloyd said. 'We'll meet at our house, and get the five forty-five bus.'

'Fine.' Ingrid sucked up the last drops of her milk shake. 'I'll be round straight after school!'

'Me too,' said Mandy. 'As soon as I've been home to pick up my stuff.'

'Why do you need to come so early?' Dinah was mystified.

Mandy laughed. 'We've got to get you dressed right. And Lloyd and Harvey might need a bit of advice too.'

'You don't need to worry about us,' Lloyd said stiffly. 'We know how to dress ourselves. Don't we, H?'

Harvey hesitated.

'Of course you do,' Mandy said gently. 'But it's a bit different with Purple.'

'It's only a club!' Lloyd was getting annoyed. 'I'm perfectly capable of choosing what to wear.'

On Wednesday, Mandy and Ingrid turned up at quarter past four, both with bulging carrier bags. Lloyd and Harvey stared at them.

'You can't wear that many clothes!' Harvey said.

'Got to have something to choose from,' said Ingrid. 'Come on, Di.'

Lloyd shook his head. 'Why has it got to be so complicated? I know exactly what I'm going to wear. And it'll only take me ten minutes to change.'

Secretly, Dinah agreed with him. But she knew better than to argue with Ingrid. And whatever Ingrid and Mandy were going to do, it couldn't be that terrible. It was only clothes, after all. It couldn't really matter what she wore.

It was almost an hour before Ingrid and Mandy were satisfied with how Dinah looked. By the time the three of them finally came rattling downstairs, it was after half past five and Lloyd and Harvey were just opening the front door to Ian.

Lloyd turned round and stared at Dinah. 'What *are* you wearing?'

'Purple chic!' Dinah said cheerfully.

She and Mandy and Ingrid spun round to show off their outfits.

Their hair was loose and they had a lot of make-up on. Even Dinah, who never used anything like that, was wearing lipstick and blusher and nail

varnish. And they all had beads round their necks and armfuls of bangles. That was what had taken all the time to choose and arrange. The actual clothes had been easy.

They were wearing the oldest things they could lay their hands on.

Dinah had found a pair of ancient, frayed jeans and borrowed a worn-out top from Mandy. Her trainers were grubby and starting to split—but they'd been smartened up with a new pair of fluorescent laces.

'This is how you ought to be dressed, Lloyd,' Ingrid said triumphantly. 'You and Harvey have got your best things on—and they're going to get really messy.'

Lloyd frowned. 'Why should they?'

Mandy and Ingrid looked at each other and giggled. Mandy took a bunch of bananas out of her little backpack and waved them under his nose.

'*It's bananas this week*,' she said. 'That's what Ellie told me. *Make sure you've got some bananas*.'

Ingrid giggled again at Lloyd's baffled expression. 'Didn't you see that article in *Lipstick* last week? People take stuff to Purple—'

'—something different every week—' Mandy said. 'And if you haven't got the right thing—'

'—it's *really terrible*!' Ingrid pulled out a bunch of bananas too.

Ian was still in the doorway. He was in old clothes too, with a flashy coloured belt to hold up his jeans. Suddenly he produced some bananas from behind his back.

'Purple chic for ever!' he said. 'Save money on clothes and spend it at the supermarket!'

Harvey was gazing at him wide-eyed. 'Have you been reading *Lipstick* too?'

'Of course not!' Ian spluttered indignantly. 'Mandy told me.'

'Why didn't she tell us then?' Lloyd growled.

Ingrid opened her eyes wide. 'But *you* said you knew all *about* Purple,' she murmured innocently.

Dinah broke in quickly before an argument could start. 'So—do we need bananas too?'

'If you can get them,' Mandy said.

Lloyd was already charging into the kitchen. 'Got any bananas, Mum?'

Mrs Hunter lifted a bunch out of the fruit bowl. 'Do you want one?'

Lloyd glanced over his shoulder at Harvey and Dinah. Then he looked back at the bananas. 'Can I have them all?'

'All?' Mrs Hunter raised her eyebrows. 'I was going to make a banoffi pie.'

Harvey followed Lloyd into the kitchen. '*Please!*' he said. 'It's really important. We need bananas to take to Purple.'

'Sounds crazy to me,' Mrs Hunter said. Then she grinned. 'But I don't want you to be left out. Here you are.' She held out the bunch of bananas. 'And mind you don't miss the bus home.'

'We won't. Thanks, Mum. You're brilliant!' Lloyd grabbed the bananas and raced out into the hall. 'Let's go!' he said.

They ran up the road to the bus stop. When the bus arrived, Mandy's cousin Ellie was standing by the door, watching out for them.

She looked them up and down as they scrambled on, but it was impossible to tell what she was thinking. Her face was dead white and expressionless and she was wearing dark purple lipstick and a lot of black eye make-up. Dinah had never seen anyone in such old, ragged clothes or so much jewellery. She had a ring on every finger—and a purple phone clipped to her belt.

'Did you remember what I told you?' Ellie muttered to Mandy. Her mouth hardly moved when she spoke.

Mandy nodded eagerly and opened the top of her little backpack. 'It's OK. We've all got some.'

'Even *him*?' Ellie jerked her head at Lloyd.

'Yes!' Lloyd said crossly. He sat down and turned his back on her.

Dinah could see he was annoyed. 'It'll be OK,' she muttered, sitting down beside him. 'We don't have to go again if we don't like it.'

'I'm fine,' Lloyd said quickly.

Have it your own way. Dinah sat back and looked round the bus. There were quite a few people she knew—and lots of strangers too. And they were all wearing make-up and old clothes dressed up with glitter and belts and badges. A couple of other people had super-white faces and dark eyes, like Ellie. Was that a coincidence? Or were they some kind of group?

The whole bus was simmering with excitement. No one was talking much about Purple, but every now and again people would slide bunches of bananas out of their backpacks, showing just an inch or two of stalk. Dinah saw the question in their eyes. *Is this the right thing?* It was easy to see who'd got it wrong. One or two people went pale and looked away.

'When the bus stops, they'll be straight into the supermarket,' Ellie muttered. 'You watch.'

The bus pulled up by the big supermarket at the edge of town. The three boys without bananas jumped up—looking red-faced and sheepish—and bolted out of the bus, racing towards the supermarket while people on the bus booed and jeered.

There were a couple of dozen teenagers ahead

of them, already pushing their way into the supermarket in front of the other shoppers. Dinah could see people glaring at them and muttering together.

'They're in for some hassle,' Ellie said coolly. 'Last week it was flour, and the clubbers bought up the lot. The regular shoppers went mad.'

Harvey frowned. 'But what's it all about? Why do we *need* bananas?'

'You'll find out,' Ellie said. She stood up and led them off the bus. Once they were all off, she set out quickly, trying to get ahead of everyone else.

They went down one side of the supermarket. Behind it was a huge car park, crammed with people. They were talking and laughing, and all of them were trying to edge closer to the long, low building on the far side.

There was no mistaking what it was. Big cut-out letters stood up on top, flashing as they spelt out the name. PURPLE!!! Below that, the whole front of the club was covered by a silver shutter that glittered and sparkled, in a constantly changing pattern.

Ingrid stared unhappily at the crowd. 'We'll never get in.'

'Of course we will,' Ellie said. 'Just follow me.' Without altering her deadpan expression, she put

her head down and started to wriggle her way through the crowd.

Mandy grabbed Ingrid's hand. 'Come on! We've got to keep up with her.'

They all squeezed after Ellie, in single file, weaving their way along the corridor she opened up for them. One or two people shouted at them, but Ellie ignored that and ploughed on, with her head down. She didn't stop until they were within fifteen metres of the big silver shutter.

'That should do,' she said.

Harvey looked nervously over his shoulder at the people behind. 'What about them? When the door opens, they'll all start pushing. We'll be squashed!'

'Don't be stupid,' Ellie said coldly. 'D'you think this is some small town club? They've got that sorted.'

Mandy patted Harvey's hand. 'Don't worry. Ellie knows what she's doing. Just have your money ready.'

It seemed like a long wait. But, just as Dinah was ready to give up and go home, everyone in the crowd suddenly began to chant.

'TEN! NINE! EIGHT! SEVEN! SIX! FIVE! . . . '

'Ready?' Ellie said.

' . . . FOUR! THREE! TWO! ONE!—ZERO!!!' roared the crowd.

Precisely on time, the huge silver shutter began to slide up, into the thickness of the wall above.

Behind it was a row of gleaming arches separated by stout silver pillars. There were twenty or thirty arches, running across the front of the building, and in front of each pillar stood a huge man dressed in a purple tracksuit.

'See the heavies?' Ellie said. 'They won't let anyone squash you, Harvey.'

Beyond the arches, there was a vast, dark space. Dinah saw lights flashing and heard music pounding from a stage in the far corner. The crowd surged forward, towards the arches, and she braced herself, ready to be pushed by the people behind.

But there was hardly any pushing. People went through the arches in an orderly, steady fashion. Dinah soon found out why.

A little way ahead of her, a boy lost patience and started to shove at the people in front. They let him through—but as he walked under an arch, the heavies on each side of it stepped forward and lifted him roughly off his feet.

He yelled furiously, but the heavies didn't react. With blank, uncaring faces, they hoisted him into the air and threw him, hard, towards the crowd. Dozens of hands grabbed him and he was passed back, from one group to another, until he was on the far side of the car park.

'That fixed him!' Ellie said. 'He won't get in this evening.'

She was at the front now, and she stepped forward into an arch. The pillar had two openings in it and she slid her money into the smaller one. Then she pushed her hand into the other for a second—and she was through.

'You next, Ing,' Mandy said. 'Just do the same as Ellie.'

Ingrid dropped her money in, put a hand into the other opening—and giggled. 'It tickles!'

When she took the hand out again there was a luminous entrance stamp on the back of it. A purple star that rippled and shifted as she moved her fingers.

Dinah followed her. Once she was through the arch, she headed for the far corner, where the music was being played, but Ellie caught at her sleeve.

'Not there!' she said. 'The main show's over here.'

Dinah didn't like being pulled about, but she let Ellie guide her, and the others followed. As they swung round, a huge voice boomed over their heads.

'You people outside are UNlucky today. Stand clear of the shutter.'

There were yells of disappointment from the people who hadn't made it inside. The huge silver shutter began to slide down again, cutting out all

the light from the car park. For a split second the lights inside the club went out too and the music stopped.

There was an instant of complete darkness and silence.

Then, into the silence, a deep voice spoke. A musical, growling whisper, amplified to fill the whole space around them.

'So now—it's the goooooood music . . . '

Everyone roared and the lights went up on a different stage, running all down one side of the club. As the music started, a glittering shape began to move along the back of the stage, half walking and half dancing. His moving hands darted left and right, pointing commandingly at the great bank of equipment in front of him, and his face stared out at the crowd.

He looks like Elvis, Dinah thought, startled.

But the moment she thought it—the face on the stage changed.

It was one of the weirdest, most unsettling things she'd ever seen. One moment she was gazing at an Elvis lookalike—next moment it was an older man, with bright, piercing eyes and a wry smile. And then—

Ingrid screeched with laughter. 'That's Madonna!'

The prancing, dancing figure stayed the same,

but the face kept shifting unpredictably. Dinah looked round at Ellie.

'Who *is* he?' she said.

But even before Ellie replied, she knew the answer. Everyone was saying the name, all over the club.

'It's DJ Pardoman!'