

CHAPTER 1

The Corn Exchange

THE CORN EXCHANGE WAS NEVER full at half past eight on a Saturday night. It wouldn't fill up till the group started playing. Tonight the group was Geno Washington and the Ram Jam Band. But now it was still just records. We paid our money and then the men at the door stamped our hands and, as always, the ultraviolet light made the mark blue and our skin eerily white.

As we stepped into the empty, cavernous hall, the vinyl hissed and the first notes of 'Green Onions' rolled round the room. The single chords of the electric organ, low and smooth, touched the pit of my stomach. It was an anthem to mod superiority. Mods had all the good music, the latest music, the cool music.

Sandra and I walked across the dusty floorboards in step, in time to the music, past the out-of-town mod boys. They came from Mile End, Ilford, Colchester. Their



sludge-green parkas were loose over their leather coats, their thin knitted ties slightly askew. They had come to listen to the music seriously, to actually watch Geno Washington. One or two of them were already dancing, passing the time, tiptoeing forward and back in their suede Hush Puppies, shrugging their shoulders.

The really interesting people weren't here yet. The Chelmsford boys would creep in about ten o'clock through the window of the men's toilets.

'Hello girls,' Brenda said as we reached the top of the queue for the cloakroom. Brenda knew us because, for the rest of the week, she worked in the mods' coffee bar, the Orpheus. She hauled our precious coats – Sandra's leather, mine suede – over the trestle table and gave us each a raffle ticket: the prize would be to get our coats back intact. I looked anxiously at Sandra. I'd only had mine a week. 'Go on,' she said. 'No one's going to nick it. Not with those sleeves.'

We still moved to the beat, now the rhythmic drums of 'Going to a Go-Go,' as we walked through into the ladies' toilets, a room of sinks and mirrors. I ran my eyes over the other mod girls jostling for a space. Some were regulars in the Orpheus; others were from villages on the edge of town, Ingatestone, Hatfield Peverel, Marks Tey, the stops on the railway line. Like Sandra and me, they wore twin-sets, and straight skirts two inches below the knee, plain,





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pinstriped, fan-pleated, and the same shoes, flat moc-casins, low slingbacks. A few of them I envied, for their cool, their nonchalance. Jenny, a girl we knew from the Orpheus, was wearing a dress that had been on TV the night before, on *Ready Steady Go!*, the mods' programme. It looked good in maroon. Another girl was still wearing her coat. 'Orange suede,' Sandra murmured. 'Nice.' She was being sarcastic. It was the way mods talked. We manoeuvred our way to the mirrors.

This was almost the best part of the evening, standing here in the toilets, the low throb of music from the hall just discernible, my hair and make-up exactly as they should be, my perfume, 'Wishing' by Avon, heavy and sweet and my beige skirt impeccably ironed. At this moment I knew that anything might happen, a dance, a conversation, a glimpse of someone exciting, a throwaway remark. Whatever happened it would be something to mull over, to savour, to write about in my diary.

Under the harsh fluorescent light we gazed at our reflections. Neither Sandra nor I were pretty, exactly (although sometimes, at home on my own, in the bedroom, I really did resemble Jean Shrimpton, the button-nosed elegant model whose picture was everywhere). But you didn't have to be good-looking to be a mod. You just had to have the right clothes and the right hair, and a smart line on the right occasion. And on Saturday nights, we always did.





I smoothed my hair down with my hands and pulled my fringe straighter. It was almost the Cleopatra look. I inspected my eyeliner and the lines in the sockets, grey to bring out the blue of my eyes, with the white pearlised sheen below my eyebrows and on my lips. All as good as it could be. I smiled.

Sandra ran her tongue over her lips. She was experimenting with a new, flavoured lipstick. “Caramel Kiss,” she said, pouting at herself.

‘You hope.’

‘You try it,’ she said, handing me the small silver tube. ‘Tastes nice. Like Caramac.’

I dabbed a touch of orange onto my lips. ‘Mmm. Not bad.’

‘Do you think Danny will be here?’ Sandra said. Danny was her on-off boyfriend. More off than on. There was a rumour he’d been let out of prison for the weekend.

‘Who knows?’ I hoped not. If he came tonight it would mean I’d have no one to dance with, and no one to talk to during the slow songs.

‘Tonight could be the night,’ she said. Her New Year’s Resolution was to get engaged, preferably to Danny.

‘I’ll keep my fingers crossed,’ I said.

We walked back through the hall, past the boys dancing neatly to the smooth saxophone of Junior Walker and the All Stars, and out onto the worn stone steps leading down to the street. On Fridays, Chelmsford’s market day, the Corn





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Exchange was the hub of the town. Farm animals, sheep and cattle, were herded down the middle of the road while business transactions took place inside. But come Saturday night, the Corn Exchange belonged to the mods.

Several scooters were parked nearby. The polished panels of the Lambrettas and the shining bubbles of the Vespas glinted silver, bottle green, navy blue under the street lights. The cool mod scooter boys leaned against the backrests, their pork-pie hats tipped over their eyes, close enough to feel the throb of the music from the hall, waiting for Geno Washington to start his set.

Then Sandra's whole body quivered. 'There he is,' she said.

It was Danny, walking through a crowd of mods, nodding to a few, self-consciously pulling his coat straight. It was a long navy-blue leather coat. And he was grinning.

Sandra turned to me, touching her hair, licking her lips. 'Do I look all right?' She was trying not to smile too much.

'You look fab.'

'So does he,' she said. 'That coat's new. Where'd he get that?'

I didn't reply. Wherever he'd got it I was sure it wasn't legal.

'Now where's he going?' she said.

He hadn't seen us. He was walking away from the Corn Exchange towards Tindal Street. There were several places he could be going in that direction, and they were





all pubs, the White Hart, the Spotted Dog or the Dolphin. And that was just Tindal Street.

‘Here we go,’ Sandra said, and grabbed my arm. We ran down the steps and pushed through a group of boys in parkas into the road.

Mick Flynn and his mate Jeff were sitting with Ray Bales in the White Hart. Like the other pubs in the road, it was an old coaching inn, with a low ceiling and bare wooden floors. ‘Have you seen Danny?’ Sandra said.

‘And hello to you too, Sandra,’ Mick said. He was wearing his bottle-green suede coat with the leather collar and his customary dark glasses. Mick Flynn was a local hero. He had been in an accident with a rocker. The story was that Mick had been on his Lambretta, riding past the bus station, showing off his shiny blue panels, waving to his mates when a rocker, with slicked-back greasy hair and a chunky leather jacket, drove towards him on his Harley-Davidson motorbike and a game of chicken began. Neither of them got out of the way and they smashed into each other. The rocker damaged his leg and Mick was blinded. It all happened before Sandra and I started going out in the evenings, but everyone knew about it. And he was still a mod, but now he wore dark glasses as part of his moddy outfit. He made it his business to keep up with all the happenings in Chelmsford. If anyone knew about Danny, it would be him. ‘Mulroney? Oh yeah, it’s this weekend,’ he said. ‘Nah, haven’t seen him.’

‘You sure?’ Sandra said.





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'I'm not his manager. Didn't he write and tell you where he'd be?' Mick said. 'All his other girlfriends seem to know.'

'What do you mean?' Sandra said. 'What other girlfriends?'

'Oh, just all the girls in Chelmsford.' He was grinning. Sandra turned.

'Don't look at me,' I said. 'I don't know what he's talking about.'

'Is that your mate Linda? The one who looks like Jean Shrimpton?'

'That's right,' Sandra said. She laughed.

I looked at her. 'You told him?' I mouthed.

'But you do, actually,' Ray said. 'Sometimes.'

'Just not tonight,' Sandra said.

'Well, tonight I'm incognito,' I said.

'Tell you what, Sandra,' Mick said, 'if Danny doesn't turn up, you can try your luck with me. But you'll have to wait in the queue, after Linda.'

Sandra pushed him, and his Guinness rocked in his hand.

'Forget about Danny,' Ray said to me. 'Come back up to the Corn Exchange and have a dance.'

I frowned. Ray lived on our estate and wore dreadful jumpers, jumpers that no proper mod would be seen dead in. I had fancied Ray once, ages ago when my dad started giving his dad a lift to union meetings. Sometimes



I had to go round to his house with a message, changing the arrangements or warning him about an extra meeting, and if Ray answered the door I would talk to him while his dad finished his tea. We talked about the Labour Party (his dad was Chairman of the local branch) or the trade union (my dad was the District Secretary of the Amalgamated Engineering Union) or Del Shannon, who sang 'Runaway' and 'Hey Little Girl'. But that was then, before I was a mod. Ray wasn't really a mod at all, and I had stopped talking to anyone about Del Shannon. It was a bit late for him to ask me to dance now. Why couldn't he have asked me a year ago?

I shook my head and rolled my eyes at Sandra, but I did wonder if he was a good dancer.

Sandra and I walked along the road to the Spotted Dog. Danny wasn't in there, either.

The Dolphin was the last pub in Tindal Street. The public bar was full of men, most of them standing up. There was a smell of spilled beer, cigarettes and sweat. As we walked in there were shouts and the scraping of furniture at the back of the room. A fight was breaking out.

Sandra pulled her shoulders back. 'He's here.' She licked her lips. Then licked them again. 'And if he doesn't like toffee, that's just too bad.'

Everyone was looking towards the door to the Gents. From behind the bar the landlord called, 'Oy, what's going



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on?’ We wove our way through the crowd. There was a crash as a chair fell against a table and legs in jeans flailed through the air. As we got closer I could see a man on the floor. It was Danny, shielding his face with his hands as another man who I didn’t recognise, a thin man in a grey suede coat, kicked him in the side. Danny was laughing.

Sandra slid over to him just before the landlord arrived. She elbowed the other man out of the way, grabbed Danny’s arm, pulled him to his feet and dragged him towards the door into the saloon bar. Danny grinned and turned back. ‘It ain’t your night, is it?’ he called to the man who was wiping blood from his nose.

The landlord called ‘Hey!’ but Sandra gave him a look and he turned his attention to the other man, pulling him towards the front door. As he pushed him into the street, the landlord said, ‘Out! And don’t come back.’ Almost to himself, he said, ‘That’s it. I’m fed up with the lot of you.’

The man in the grey suede coat shouted back through the door, ‘We had a deal, Mulroney, and you know what the deal was. Get it sorted out.’

Danny waved his hands in the air as if he was ready to continue the fight, and Sandra hissed, ‘Behave!’ Danny’s arms fell to his sides and he gave Sandra a dazed smile.

I wondered if that was why Danny liked Sandra, because she took control. I wondered if that was why she liked him, because she could.





In the saloon bar Sandra balanced Danny on a stool at a table. The tables and a few tatty rugs differentiated it from the public bar, along with faded prints of horses on the walls.

‘All right,’ I said, ‘I’m going back to the Corn Exchange.’ I wanted to see if Ray had meant what he said.

‘You can’t go yet,’ Sandra said. ‘What am I going to do with him like this?’

Danny was still grinning, rubbing his side, swaying on the stool. He had a small cut below his eye and blood on his cheek. ‘Hello, darling,’ he kept saying to Sandra. ‘What’s your name?’

‘My name is Sandra.’ She tugged his sleeve as he slid dangerously over to one side. ‘I’m your girlfriend.’

‘Are you?’ He looked at Sandra, then slowly turned his head to me, then back to Sandra. ‘Is it my eyes, or are there two of you?’

‘It’s your eyes,’ Sandra said.

‘Is that Linda, Little Lindy Lindah?’ Danny moaned. ‘You still banning the bomb, Linda? Still wearing the badge? What’s she wear that badge for, Sandy? Can’t she afford proper jewellery? Why do you wear a badge, Linda?’

The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and my CND badge were important to me, but I didn’t want to talk about that tonight, especially not with someone who was drunk and who had a loud voice. ‘Why were you and that bloke fighting?’ I said, to change the subject.





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‘Who? What? Where is he, what’s he saying . . .?’

‘Don’t worry about him. He’s long gone,’ Sandra said. ‘Look at you. What have you been doing?’

‘I have been celebrating my release from the worst place in the world, Wormwood Scrubs.’

A couple at the next table exchanged a glance. They both still had their coats on and the woman had a scarf on her head.

Danny leered at them.

‘Well! I think someone’s in the wrong bar,’ the woman said loudly. She prodded her husband and gestured to the door. He got to his feet, picked up his small glass of beer and drained it in one mouthful. ‘I didn’t mean straightaway, Cyril,’ she said, but she stood up and they left.

‘Thank Christ for that,’ Danny said, and tipped very slowly to his right until his head touched the bench.

‘We’ve got to stay with him,’ Sandra said.

‘Us?’ I said. ‘But we’ve paid for our tickets.’

‘Sandy!’ Danny shouted, suddenly sitting up. ‘Oh, there you are.’ Then he crooned. ‘Sandy, Sandy. Do you think I’m handy?’

‘Not at the moment.’ She shook her head at me.

‘Do you think I look dandy, Sandy?’ He held out his arms as if he wanted to hug her. Then he toppled off the stool and onto the floor.

‘Get up,’ Sandra hissed.





‘Because guess what, I feel randy,’ he moaned, and then he laughed. ‘Get us a shandy.’

‘Shut up, you drunk lump.’

‘Oh, Sandy, I love it when you talk dirty. Get me a brandy, Sandy, and then we’ll be jamdy.’ He laughed again.

‘We can’t leave him,’ Sandra said.

‘He’s not going to ask you to marry him like this,’ I murmured.

‘This might be the best chance I get,’ she whispered.

Danny was staggering to his feet. ‘How about a drink?’ he said.

‘What shall I do?’ Sandra said.

‘Let’s walk him back to the Corn Exchange,’ I suggested. ‘See if we can find someone to take him home.’

Sandra grabbed Danny’s arm and wrapped it round her neck. He blinked hard and shook himself like a wet dog. ‘OK, girl,’ he said. ‘Let’s go.’

Sandra passed me her handbag and slowly we left the pub.

People were milling about on the steps of the Corn Exchange. Mick was chatting to some girls who worked in Boots. Jeff was tinkering with his scooter. I could hear live music, a blaring saxophone and crashing cymbals, and I wanted to be inside.

Sandra tried to lean Danny against a lamp post. ‘Go and collect our coats.’ She thrust her ticket into my hand. ‘We’re getting a taxi home.’





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I pushed my way into the hall. The place was packed. Geno Washington was singing, 'Oh, Geno!' and people were joining in, swaying and clapping.

I retrieved our coats and elbowed my way back through the throng by the stage, past the smoochers dancing, towards the doors. I was almost there when Ray grabbed my arm and swung me round. 'You came!'

I held out the coats. 'It's home time.'

'Five minutes.'

I didn't want to leave, even if his jumper looked like his mum had knitted it. I might even have danced with him, but I shook my head and wove my way out.

Danny, Sandra and I walked up to the railway station to find a taxi. We would drop Danny at his landlady's and then we'd carry on home, Sandra said. In the queue I held back a little so they could talk. I could see Sandra smiling as Danny stroked her face. When we reached the front of the queue, Danny opened the taxi door with a flourish. I slid into the back seat and Sandra followed, tucking her coat round her to make space, but not too much, so that Danny could squeeze in beside her. Danny bent down then slapped his forehead theatrically. 'Oh Sandy, guess what, I forgot. I've got to deliver some stuff.'

'Now?' Sandra said. 'I thought you won the fight.'

'Yeah, now. No, not to him. Another . . . contact of mine. So . . . bye.' Danny puckered his lips in a kiss, then slammed the door. We watched him stagger into the station.





‘Do you want to go after him?’ I said. ‘Keep him out of trouble?’

‘There’s no point. I bet he’s just going up West.’ Most of the boys we knew went up to the West End of London when the Corn Exchange closed, to the Flamingo or the Marquee, clubs where they could hear more music, take more drugs and maybe have another fight or two. ‘Danny didn’t want to see me home, is the truth of it,’ she said sadly. The taxi drove past the bus station. ‘He said he’ll see me next week. But that could mean anything. Still,’ Sandra tossed a coin in her hand, ‘he gave me half a crown to pay for the taxi.’

‘That’s almost like getting engaged, in Danny’s terms,’ I said. Two and six was a big commitment.

‘Of course, I did just lend him five bob.’ She looked down at her bare left hand. ‘Do you think he’ll ever ask me to get engaged?’



I wanted to say, ‘You’re the Catholic. You’re supposed to believe in miracles.’ But as we passed a street light I could see her mouth making a funny shape, as if she was going to cry, so I said, ‘You don’t know. He might. He should do – you’d keep him on the straight and narrow.’

‘Yes,’ she agreed, ‘I would.’

The taxi dropped us at the shops so Sandra’s mum and dad wouldn’t ask questions. We walked up to her house together, said goodnight and I carried on up the road.

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The house was quiet when I got indoors. The telly was off, Mum and my sister Judith were in bed, but Dad was still up, sitting in the front room with his bulky faded red copy of George Bernard Shaw's *Collected Works*. I didn't know anyone else whose dad read plays. 'Good time, love?' he said.

I thought about the evening. We had scarcely spent ten minutes in the Corn Exchange. There'd been Danny's fight in the Dolphin, I'd seen a dress I liked, Ray had asked me to dance and Sandra and I had extravagantly taken a taxi home. 'Not bad.'

CHAPTER 2

The Orpheus

Six months earlier

SANDRA'S OLDER SISTER, MARIE, became a mod first, so it was natural that Sandra should be a mod, and even more natural that I should be a mod, too. Sandra and I had been best friends for years, since our family had moved onto the estate. She lived across the road, four doors down, and though we'd always gone to different schools, because she was Catholic, we'd played together after school and in all the school holidays. We went bike riding, we made dens, played schools, put on plays. We'd even written a newspaper, the *Hayfield News*, that we handwrote and sewed together, then delivered to the houses around us.

Marie and her friend Deirdre were three years older than us, but they had been our friends. They would come into town with us on Saturday mornings, and to the pictures, the Odeon or the Regent, on Saturday afternoons. But now we hardly saw them, Marie was courting strong,



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and when we did see them they were full of snide comments about our clothes – too ordinary, and the way we did our hair – too messy, and our age – too childish.

Sandra and I agreed that if all mods thought like that, who'd want to be a mod? But we did want to be mods. We watched *Ready Steady Go!*. We liked the clothes, we liked the dancing, and we loved the music. We wanted to be part of it, we wanted to be mods. And where we really wanted to go was the Orpheus, the mods' coffee bar in town, with its jukebox and frothy coffee and scooters parked outside. Then and only then would we be able to call ourselves mods. But we didn't dare step into its dark, dangerous depths.

Sandra was almost ready to leave school, and I was a year younger, when we first slid into the Orpheus. We were hovering outside, as we always did when we came into town, pretending to look in the art shop window, trying to catch the atmosphere of the coffee bar below, straining to hear the music, yearning to go inside.

As we stood listening to the final notes of Paul Jones' insistent harmonica on '5-4-3-2-1', rain began to fall. Now we had an excuse for standing there. If Marie came past we could say we were sheltering under the awning of the art shop.

Some mods pattered up on their scooters, parka hoods over their heads. As they parked, one boy's scooter toppled onto its side. As he tried to pull it upright, he fell over too. He stood up, soaked with rain, oil stains on his parka. The





others laughed. They were jostling and pushing each other, then they ran inside.

Sandra and I looked at each other. 'If they're going in looking like that, we might as well go in too,' she said, in a natural way.

'We're not even wet,' I said.

We stepped off the street into a dark narrow corridor. On the left was the entrance to the art shop, and at the end of the corridor was another door – the door to the Orpheus. The boys had disappeared, clattering down the stairs. The faint pulse of music came up through the floor. It was the Hollies asking us to 'Stay'. 'It's a sign,' Sandra whispered. She pushed open the door which led to a narrow landing and the staircase down to the cellar. My heart started pounding. This was it. We were here at last. We were going into the Orpheus. This is where the mods were, with their stylish clothes and good music. This is where our lives would change. We held on to the rail and stepped slowly down the steep, twisting staircase.

There was hardly any light, and at first there seemed to be nothing but walls and pillars and a counter. Then I realised I was looking at reflections in the smoky mirrors on the walls. It was much bigger than I'd imagined – it was the cellar area of not one, but two shops. Groups of mods stood around tables or sat on leather benches looking like pictures from the pages of the *Evening News*. Boys slouched in green parkas, in dark suede or leather coats.





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They were clean-shaven; their hair was short and smart. There were fewer girls, but they too wore suede jackets and had short, neat hair. One girl in a black leather coat strolled round the room. Her hair was backcombed; it was almost a beehive. That wasn't right for a mod. That was rocker girl hair. Surely she was in the wrong place, she should have been in the Long Bar, the rockers' coffee bar. But people seemed to like her, greeting her, or waving a hand as she passed. The hair didn't seem to matter. Perhaps the mod rules weren't as strict as I thought, perhaps they weren't as strict as I wanted them to be. I gazed round the room. One girl leaned casually against the counter, stirring a cup of coffee. Her hair was swinging and shiny, Cleopatra-style, like Cathy McGowan's from *Ready Steady Go!*, the look Sandra and I were aiming for.

Apart from the Cathy McGowan girl and the girl with the beehive, everyone seemed to be engaged in conversation. They all looked sophisticated and confident. Someone flicked a glance towards us, taking us in, judging us. My brown suedette jacket, which had seemed quite modern and stylish outside, now felt like the cheap imitation it was. This is why we shouldn't have come. We weren't ready. We didn't have the money to carry it off.

Sandra walked casually over to the counter on the right of the staircase to order us a drink, while I lingered at the foot of the stairs, shrinking against a pillar, afraid someone would talk to me, hoping they would. The record had





ended and now every eye seemed to be turned on us, the new girls. I wondered where the wet scooter boys had disappeared to. Why was no one looking at them?

But then the thin, high guitar notes of a song that I waited for every night on Radio Luxembourg snaked out of the jukebox, 'Hi-Heel Sneakers' by Tommy Tucker. I knew the words to this record. I loved this record. On Radio Luxembourg the sound was thin and tinny and faded in and out. But here, the song filled the room, rolling over every surface, bouncing off the walls. It was an overture, an introduction.

A boy appeared round the corner, dancing on the tip-toes of his Hush Puppies, his long suede coat flapping, weaving his way between the tables, singing along with Tommy Tucker. He danced up to me. 'Hi-Heel Sneakers,' he sang into my face, opening his eyes wide. He took my hand. I looked round quickly for Sandra, thrilled, terrified, worrying that he would say something about suedette, or my hair, or my age, as he began slowly jiving with me, turning me under his arm. Then abruptly he dropped my hand and danced away.

'That was Blond Don,' Sandra murmured, appearing beside me with two glasses of milk. 'Marie says he pops pills like they're sherbet lemons. You're lucky he didn't push some purple hearts down your throat.'

'I don't think I need them,' I said. My heart was racing from the dancing.





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I thought that Blond Don with his long suede coat and his bleached white hair was the epitome of what being a mod was all about: careless, showy, a hint of danger, a good dancer. But that was before I met Tap.

For some weeks we didn't go back. Sandra said the reason no one had talked to us, apart from Blond Don, and that didn't count, was the CND badge on the lapel of my jacket. It was the expensive 2s 6d one, small, black and silver. But it was a badge. She said it let us down. The unwritten rule was that if you were going to wear badges you had to wear a lot on your parka, and you had to be a boy. And you didn't have to care about what the badge represented. But I believed in banning the bomb, and I was proud of the badge.

I said if there was a reason no one spoke to us it was because they didn't know us and because I was wearing a suedette jacket and not a suede one. 'So it was your fault anyway,' Sandra said.

But then the warm weather started and we went, on the train, to Southend. With my saved-up Christmas and birthday money I was able to buy myself mod. I chose a royal-blue twinset and a grey fan-pleated skirt. Sandra bought a pink jumper and a pinstriped skirt. Now we didn't need the second-hand dresses Marie and Deirdre had sold us, with their insecure belts and strange, pale colours, and sunshine meant we didn't have to wear jackets at all. We were set.





We began to go to the Orpheus regularly. We started to recognise the scooters and their owners – the maroon GS, the cream LI with sky-blue panels, the green Vespa with silver bubbles. We said hello to Jenny, the Cathy McGowan girl. One day Blond Don called me by name. ‘Hey, Linda, where’s your mate Sandra?’

‘She’ll be down in a few minutes.’

He knew our names. He’d asked about us. We were in. And now it seemed as if we’d never been anywhere else. We went to the Orpheus every Saturday, and on school nights we’d drop in after our tea when our mums thought we were across the road, watching each other’s telly. We put records on the jukebox. We chatted to Brenda behind the counter. We looked at strangers who walked in. But I still wore my badge.

I was wearing the badge the day I spoke to Tap for the first time. It was carefully attached to my new nylon mac. Although I was worried about making permanent holes in the lapel, the badge was important. As I walked over to the counter, Mick’s friend Jeff came up behind me and asked me to buy him a glass of milk. Then he laughed. ‘Only kidding. What do you want?’ Jeff was doing a building apprenticeship. A small shower of plaster fell from his sleeve onto the counter as he called Brenda and ordered two glasses of milk.

‘I’ll have one too.’ Tap was suddenly there at my side, looking cool in a pale blue Fred Perry and grey mohair





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trousers. He was Chelmsford's biggest mod. He leaned forward and brushed a flake of plaster from my shoulder. 'What's this?' he said. 'What are you wearing?'

'It's a badge. A CND badge.'

'Not the badge, girl. The badge is the best part of it. I mean this.' He tweaked my sleeve.

'It's a nylon mac.' Nylon macs were all the go. Navy-blue nylon macs.

'But what colour do you call that?'

I had so hoped it would work. 'It's caramel,' I said. Mum had bought it at a jumble sale. I had altered the hem and changed the buttons. 'Caramel's coming in,' I said, lifting my chin. 'It's going to be really big.' I looked into his eyes. They were very blue. 'That's what I heard, anyway.'

He shook his head. He grinned. 'I think you heard wrong. Where you from? Frinton-on-Sea? 'Cos it ain't coming in here.' He looked at me. 'Well, I suppose if it never comes in, it never goes out.' He stroked another piece of plaster from my shoulder. 'I'll get hers,' he said to Jeff. He put some money on the counter and walked away.

'He didn't,' Sandra said when I told her.

'He did.'

'He must have thought you had dandruff and needed a bit of help,' she said. 'Why would he talk to you?'

'We were discussing fashion.'

'He felt sorry for you,' she said, 'cos you fancy him and you're wearing a brown mac.'





'I don't fancy him,' I said. 'I don't know him.'

'Yes you do, everyone knows Tap. You fancy him! Not that it'll do you any good,' Sandra said.

Tap came and went in the Orpheus. He worked in The Boutique, the best men's clothes shop in Chelmsford, and weeks went by and we didn't catch sight of him.

'See?' Sandra would say, occasionally. 'He's in London all the time. Probably got some fancy bird up there. He can't be doing with girls in nylon macs from Frinton.'

Then we started to go to the Corn Exchange on Saturday nights. All the best groups came, The Who, the Yardbirds, Georgie Fame and the Blue Flames, and the solo singers, David Bowie, Wilson Pickett, Memphis Slim. As the weather got colder Sandra lent me her suede jacket, which she'd had for her birthday, while she wore her leather coat which she'd bought with her first month's wages. And then finally, with pocket money and a loan from my mum, I bought my own suede.

And I pinned my CND badge onto the collar. Sometimes people didn't notice it at all, but then, if I was putting on my coat to go home or to go for a walk round town, someone would ask, 'Ban the Bomb? Do you ban the bomb?' There'd be a pause and then, 'Do you believe in free love?' And suddenly I'd feel serious and out of place. But I still wore it.

