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Who cares?

Before I had children I had imagined it would be a sociable affair. A life spent picnicking or drinking coffee in friend's houses while children climbed trees or dug for worms in the garden. How rarely does that vision materialise, two children later.

Yesterday my five year old daughter was invited to the birthday party of one of her friends. By the time we got to the party, twelve of the other guests had arrived and were charging around the garden. But their parents were nowhere to be seen. In common with most children's tea parties I seem to attend, the parents treat the occasions as an opportunity to escape from their offspring, to go and have their toenails painted or to do the weekly shop, returning a couple of hours later to pick up the reveller.

This arrangement seems handy enough, but what if something goes wrong? As I sat, slightly self-consciously as the only parent with nothing better to do yesterday but sip tea and make daisy chains, I became aware that all the children, the entire party, had vanished. There is a big pond at the end of the garden and a busy road outside. The parents in charge of the party were busy getting the games and tea ready. Granny, was there, staring silently into the middle-distance as she had been for a good couple of hours.

Who was responsible? Was it supposed to me?

The same parents that scarpered as soon as they could, would I imagine sue for millions if one of their darlings were to drown.

At my own daughters birthday party a few weeks ago, many of the parents didn't even say hello before dumping and running.

I looked out of the window at one point to see a large band of five years olds hopping I felt furious that I was left on my own minding all these brats, while their parents, I supposed, were in Waitrose, weighing up whether to buy the Pouilly Fume or Chablis. Or maybe enjoying a cup of tea with the Saturday papers.

over a stile onto a track which leads to a road. As I rushed outside to corral all the children in, I

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saw another boy snap some goalposts in two on his head and start to howl.

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