

# IF ONLY

ADELE BROADBENT



# Chapter 1

Music pounded into the street. People spilled down onto the lawn, silhouetted against coloured lights strung across the villa's veranda. Three guys emerged and staggered down the steps and I wondered if I'd made a huge mistake.

I thought about staying in the taxi and going home, but when I turned to Tam, she was laughing with the others we'd caught a ride with. Someone slid open the van door and when Tam climbed out, I followed. The confidence she'd shown all night seemed to waver for a moment, before she quickly peeled off her long-sleeved shirt. Underneath was a black, sparkly top with more strategically placed holes than a golf course.

'What are you doing?' I hissed.

She stuffed her top into her bag, then smoothed down her long, black hair. 'Looking the part, K. Does my lipstick look okay?'

'You knew? About the party?'

'No,' she said. 'I heard them talking about it at school, and hoped we'd be invited after the show. And look! Here we are.'

'I don't know, Tam.' I looked up the drive at someone

hunched over in the garden. Seconds later, I saw why. I looked away again, feeling sick myself. ‘Do you even know who lives here? Why don’t we just go home? We’ve been to the show. I can pay for a taxi.’

She pulled me aside. ‘Come on, K. Evan invited us.’ She glanced over at the group we came with. ‘This is our chance. A real party.’

I knew what she meant. The only parties we’d ever been invited to involved fairy bread and fizzy when we were little, and grape juice and our parents as we got older. Pros and cons tumbled in my head. It was something Dad always did when he was contemplating something, and I’d picked up the annoying habit. Sometimes I wished I was more spontaneous – like Tam.

I could demand to go home and have Tam never speak to me again, or stay and make her entire year.

She squeezed my arm. ‘Imagine going to school on Monday and actually being able to talk about a real party, instead of just hearing about other people’s weekends. *Please, K.*’

Her dark gaze pleaded under her false eyelashes. She’d been so excited about it all. I’d hardly believed it when she’d told me her plans, three days before.

‘Oh my gosh,’ she’d gushed. ‘This is epic.’ It was Tam’s long

drawn-out, in-depth explanations of the most, simple things that were epic. She could spend five minutes telling me how she got dressed in the morning.

‘You know how I told you I met Aimee whose brother is Ben who knows Evan who was going out with Larissa?’ She’d lost me already. I just nodded as usual.

‘Well,’ she took a deep breath and launched into how she came about getting the tickets. Tickets to an annual comedy festival that was famous for being amazing. I pulled a face as I tried to keep up with who knew who and why, and who they liked and who they didn’t and why, and eventually we came back around to Evan who had an older brother who was given extra tickets.

‘You’re amazing,’ I said.

‘Isn’t it fabulous?’ Tam beamed.

‘I mean, it’s amazing you remember all this stuff.’

‘It’s a gift,’ she’d said. ‘Stick with me and we’ll make it to the top.’

By the look on her face I’d seen she really believed it. ‘So how do we pay for them?’

She’d waved her hand. ‘Oh, we’ll worry about that later. Evan said it’s no biggie, I mean, he was given the tickets after all. It’s not like he’s *paid* for them.’

‘Yeah, but –’

‘Kayla!’ She’d grabbed my arm. ‘Stop being a worrywart. This is going to be awesome! We’re going to the comedy festival with the popular peeps. I’ve been working on this forever!’

With the tickets in her sights, she was like a bumblebee who’d fallen into a bucket of coffee and had only been saved after she’d swallowed half of it. She’d been buzzing ever since.

It *had* been an awesome night, and to be invited to a party afterwards was a dream come true for Tam. Ever since kindly, she’d always wanted to be in the popular group, doing the stuff *they* did.

We’d never achieved it in primary school or intermediate. It was always just our little group of two, no matter how hard Tam tried. Personally, I didn’t really mind, but Tam was determined to crack their battlements now that we were at Mana High.

And we’d done it. Well, *she* had. I was just a tag-along. I looked into her pleading face. The popularity thing didn’t mean much to me, but Tam did. I couldn’t spoil it for her. With one last look at the party crowd I smiled. ‘Okay. But don’t you dare ditch me, Tamzyn Bennett.’

She squealed and gave me a quick hug, before linking arms and pulling me up the driveway after the others. ‘Let’s catch up with Evan.’