

Camden Town Tales



The Celeb Next Door

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Prologue



I can't believe I'm here. In the VIP tent. On the friends and family guest list!

Regent's Park has been transformed for the festival. There are two huge stages at either end of the green space, and stalls everywhere selling food, clothes and band merchandise. There are thousands of people here and the atmosphere is amazing. It's like a giant, outdoor, all-day party.

Max and I are just walking out of the tent to have a wander when I spot a familiar face. It's Lisa, a girl from my year, and two of her equally bitchy mates, and they're hanging around by the entrance, waiting to see who comes out. Lisa is not, and never has been, my friend. Until now, it seems.

'Rosie!' she screams in excitement. 'Oh my God, it's good to see you! What are you doing here?' She rushes over to my side, leaving her friends to trot after her. 'Hey, did I see you just come out of the VIP tent? How come?'

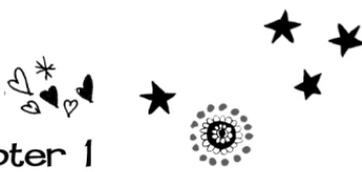
'Hey, Lisa.' I beam at her and let her kiss me on the cheek. 'I'm here because I know the guys in the band.' I fiddle with my red wristband and try not to look too smug. 'Rufus Justice is my next-door neighbour. And,' I nod towards Max, who is right next to me, holding my hand, 'this is my boyfriend Max – Rufus's brother.'

Lisa gives me exactly the reaction I am hoping for. Her eyes grow round and huge and, even though she's at least three inches taller than me, I could swear that she's looking up at me in awe. It's a shame it's the summer holidays. Lisa has such a big mouth that if it were term-time, the news of my celebrity romance would have spread round the school within a day.

'Oh right, cool,' she says, and I can tell she's itching to ask if I can get her a VIP pass too, but she doesn't have the guts to ask.

As amazing as it feels, I have to check myself. How did I, Rosie Buttery, suddenly become someone worth knowing?

I guess it all began one Sunday afternoon, a few weeks before the summer holidays . . .



Chapter 1

The Celebometer



‘**G**uess what, Vix!’ My voice must be louder than I think because the people walking past me turn around to stare. ‘I have just spotted *the* most amazing celebrity in Costa Coffee. I had to go in to make sure. I swear it was him!’

I wait for Vix to ask me who, but she doesn’t, so I tell her anyway. ‘It was Adam Grigson, the guy from the vampire film. He smiled at me too.’ OK, he was probably aiming it at the woman standing behind me, but that’s just a technicality: he did smile in my general direction.

‘Cool, well done, Rosie,’ replies Vix, not very enthusiastically.

Now I can't help wishing I'd phoned Sky first instead.

'You've got to admit that it's a pretty amazing spot, Vix. A fifty-pointer. And it puts me way in the lead.'

'Sure,' Vix agrees. 'By the way, I forgot to mention that I spotted someone too. Earlier.'

'Yeah? So why didn't you call? Tell me . . . Go on . . .'

'Didn't seem that important. And I can't remember her name . . .'

'Young? Old? Fat? I need a bit more to go on.'

'Oh you know, thingy . . .' Vix sounds frustrated. 'From that soap you like. The one with the big hair.'

'Oh, *thingy*. Yeah, right. You mean Cheryl-Anne Taylor. You can't have full points if you don't know her name. I'll give you . . . seven.'

'Fine,' says Vix. She laughs. 'Whatever. You take it so seriously, Rosie, anyone would think you were competing in the Olympics, or something.'

Maybe I do take the game a bit too seriously, but I want my friends to play it properly. It's called the Celebometer and I made it up on my way back from Camden Market one Sunday afternoon a few weeks ago. There are always so many actors and musicians and TV presenters in Camden Town that it seems a shame not to turn spotting them into a sport.

The rules are simple: if you spot somebody you recognise, you have to call or text at least one of your friends to record it. Points are awarded according to the

spotee's level of fame, how fanciable they are and whether you manage to make eye contact or talk to them. I haven't decided what the prize is. I think I'll just make it up as I go along. I'm good at that.

But if Vix doesn't feel like joining in today, I'm not going to force her.

'Look, Vix, it's fine by me if you don't want to play, really.'

She sighs. 'It's not that. It was fun to start with. It just feels like all you ever want to talk about these days is which celebrity you've seen. I'd rather talk about real stuff sometimes, you know?'

'Sure. Course.' I didn't realise I was doing that. 'I'm sorry.'

'Don't worry about it, hun,' she says, affectionately.

'So are you coming round tonight?'

'I can't, I'm sorry. Mum wants the whole family to have dinner together. I've got no choice, worse luck.'

'Poor you. I guess I'll see you tomorrow, then, on the way to school. And we'll chat online later, of course. I'll go and see what Sky is up to. I'm just turning into our street now. Bye, then . . .'

I have lived in Paradise Avenue, a hotch-potch of a street in Camden Town, all my life. My best friends Sky and Vix live here too. It isn't a particularly long street, but it is a strange-looking one. None of the buildings match. At one end of the street there's a council block and, at the

other, several big Victorian houses. I live in one of these – number seventeen – not because I’m rich, but because it’s been in my family for about sixty years.

Visitors always comment that Paradise Avenue has ‘character’ – and so do the people who live on it. As well as lawyers and business people and doctors, like my mum who works at the local health centre, there are some eccentric old ladies living in the sheltered housing block, and several writers and musicians. If you walk down the street at night, you are bound to hear a band practising, a guitar teacher giving lessons, or an opera singer rehearsing her scales.

There are also some people on Paradise Avenue whom you might want to avoid. There’s a very weird man who never cuts or washes his hair and spends all day in the betting shop, and a group of squatters who have taken over an empty house and turned it into an ‘art collective’.

Paradise Avenue certainly isn’t a street to live on if you like peace and quiet. But nobody chooses to live in Camden Town for that.

I’m at Sky’s flat now. I ring her doorbell, hoping that she’ll answer, and not her mother. It’s not that I don’t like Sky’s mum, I’m just not in the mood for chatting to her today. She’s one of those mums who insists on you calling her by her first name (Rebecca) and asking you about what you’ve been up to, as if she’s your friend too. Sky says it’s because she’s lonely since her dad left, but it can be

really embarrassing, especially when she tries to act like a teenager and wants to talk about boys or come out to the market with us.

It makes me glad that my mum is straight-laced and boring, like mums should be. I'm also very grateful that my parents gave me and my brother Charlie normal names. Sky's sisters are called Ocean and Grass. That would be fine if they all lived on a hippie commune somewhere in India, but not when they have to go to the local comprehensive in the middle of London. Especially when their surname is Smith.

'Hello?' Sky's voice blares through the intercom, making me jump.

'Hey, it's me. Can I come up?'

'Yes! Thank God it's you. Mum's expecting some of her weird friends for dinner. Come up, please.'

She's at the top of the stairs, waiting to greet me, when I arrive. She looks far too groomed for a Sunday evening at home, with her glossy, dark hair styled perfectly, and a stretchy black dress. Sky doesn't do casual. 'Save me,' she mouths, as we hug.

I giggle and try not to notice the weird smell coming from the kitchen. 'You can come round to mine if you like.'

'Unfortunately, I can't. Mum wants me to accompany her on the guitar. They're singing sixteenth-century madrigals. Don't you dare say anything . . .'

‘I wouldn’t dream of it,’ I say, but I can’t help smirking. ‘Maybe you could add a bit of rapping in the middle.’

Sky motions as if to slap me. I duck. ‘So what have you been up to since I saw you earlier?’

‘Just hanging out at the shops. Hey, I almost forgot to tell you: I had the most amazing star spot before . . .’

Sky is far more impressed than Vix at the mention of Adam Grigson’s name. ‘Seriously? Like, wow!’ she says. She is as celebrity mad as me, if not more, mainly because it annoys her mum, who thinks celebrity culture is the worst thing ever to happen to society and will lead to the end of the world. ‘You should have spoken to him. I wonder what he was doing in Camden.’

‘I heard there’s a film being made around here. I saw some location vans the other day. Oh my God, do you think they might have been filming in the café? Maybe I’ll be in it, in the background, like an extra.’

‘They wouldn’t have you,’ says Sky, grinning. ‘You’d keep waving at the cameras, just to make sure you were seen.’

‘That’s not fair.’ I pout, comically (my ‘trout pout’ look, Sky calls it). ‘Although you’re probably right.’

We go into Sky’s bedroom, put on some music and sit on her bed and chat for a while. From outside in the hall we hear the intercom buzz several times, and then the chatter of high-pitched voices. There’s a knock on the door and before Sky can say anything, her mum pushes it open. She’s wearing a long, loose, linen dress, and – very

obviously – no bra. I try not to look.

‘Hello, Rosie,’ she says, smiling at me. ‘Why didn’t you come to say hello? It would have been lovely to talk to you.’

‘Sorry, Mrs . . . Rebecca,’ I tell her, sheepishly.

Sky nudges me in the ribs with her elbow, which makes me want to laugh.

‘Now, would you like to stay for dinner? Do you sing or play an instrument? We’re having a music night.’

‘I’m tone deaf, Rebecca.’ That’s a lie, but I’m sure it’s only a little white one. ‘I’d ruin it.’ Which is definitely the truth.

‘Oh no, I’m certain you wouldn’t. You could play the tambourine.’

Sky nudges me again and this time I have to try really hard to suppress a giggle. I hold my breath but it bursts out of me, like a snort. ‘Thanks so much, Rebecca, but honestly, I don’t want to spoil your evening. Anyway, I said I’d be home for dinner.’

‘That’s OK.’ She smiles. ‘In that case, Rosie, I don’t mean to be rude, but would you mind making your way home soon? We need to make a start.’

‘Not at all, er, Rebecca.’ I clamber up from the bed. ‘I’ll go now.’ I kiss Sky and make the shape of a phone with my hand. ‘Later.’

Sky catches my eye and nods furiously. ‘Save me,’ she mouths again, and I purse my lips in sympathy.

It's almost dusk now and there aren't many people about, just a couple strolling to the nearby pub. I don't recognise them, but strangers often use my street as a short cut to the main road. My house is at the far end, a few minutes' walk from Sky's flat.

As I walk, I wonder if there's anything good on television tonight. I've got that empty Sunday evening feeling, the dread of having to get up early tomorrow and face a whole week at school. Next weekend is such a long way away.

I'm so engrossed in my thoughts that, as I approach my house, I almost don't notice the large removal lorry parked outside the house next door.

'Careful, love,' says a man, carrying a large box. He narrowly avoids bumping into me. 'This stuff is expensive.'

'Oh God, sorry.' I stop and look around me. Now I can see that there are other men carrying boxes from the lorry into the house. It's the largest house on the street and it's been empty for almost a year. There's been lots of building work going on at the house for the past few months – annoying drilling and knocking sounds, which have driven me mad. It's hard enough to do my homework when there aren't any distractions.

Now somebody is finally moving in. Will there be a girl my age, or even better, a fit boy? Knowing my luck, it will be a family with young kids, or some old people who'll ask me to turn my music down when it isn't even loud.

‘Is someone moving in?’ I ask one of the removal men. It’s a stupid question and I know it. I’m just not sure how else to broach the subject. ‘I live next door, you see.’

‘Yeah,’ says the man. ‘Young guy. Think he’s some sort of musician.’ He gestures to the house and then points to the large, antique wooden table he’s off-loading from the lorry. ‘Must be doing all right for himself, eh?’

I nod. A musician sounds promising, especially a rich, successful one. ‘Do you mind if I stand here a while?’

‘Feel free,’ says the removal man, who is out of breath and sweaty. ‘No skin off my nose.’

I lean up against the wall and look at the objects being unloaded from the lorry. As well as furniture and boxes of CDs, there is what looks like expensive studio recording equipment.

I’m beginning to feel a bit cold now and thinking I should go inside because Mum will be wondering where I am, when I hear a clattering from the lorry and a ‘Whoops, careful!’ followed by something much ruder from one of the removal men. Three of them are struggling with something they’ve clearly been told to treat with care.

Curious, I walk closer. It’s a huge drum kit. So, my new neighbour is a drummer? Drummers aren’t quite as cool as guitarists or singers, but at least they won’t complain about the noise from next door.

And then I notice something that makes me look again

in disbelief: the word *Fieldstar* and a squiggly star logo emblazoned on the front of the drum kit in bright red, luminous paint. I've seen this kit before, so many times, on TV and in pictures in magazines (and in posters on my walls). That logo means that the kit can only belong to one person: Rufus Justice, the drummer for my favourite band, Fieldstar.

My hand is already twitching for my phone. I can't wait to tell Vix and Sky the most thrilling news they'll have heard all year. The gorgeous and talented Rufus Justice is going to be my next-door neighbour!

Surely that must be worth at least five thousand points on the Celebometer scale. In fact, there is no competition. Game over!

