

A long time ago, in a TV studio, three contestants are on tenterhooks. Bathed by hot, dazzling lights, they are impaled by the camera lens, beaming to millions of homes.

The live audience has been adequately revved up by Ricky Riviera, whose nicotine-stained teeth appear white next to his spray-tanned visage and signature black velvet suit. “And now, on Tomorrow’s Stars, give a warm welcome to our finalists!”

The audience claps and stamps, one hungry beast.

“Simon, you have the stage,” proclaims Ricky.

The first lamb to the slaughter is a young lad, wearing a purple shirt and a nervous grin. Two doves fly onto his forearm, and in an instant are covered beneath a scarlet silk. With a drumroll, the boy whips away the cloth and the birds are no more. The audience cheers. A camera pans to his proud parents. “That’s my boy,” mouths his dad.

Dani, the second finalist, sneers nastily. “Boring. Should’ve made himself disappear,” she mutters loudly to the girl to her right, who is twirling a strand of her long raven hair. “And what’s your gig, Rapunzel?”

“Dani, you have the stage.”

Dani strides arrogantly to the mic. “And now for something a little more risqué than a child’s box of tricks,” she purrs, and winks at the judges. “This one is a family favourite. A blind man, an amputee, and a bald lady go into a pub...” The spectators lean forward in amazement as she continues, a force of bad taste, the joke becoming less and less family-friendly. Finally, she cackles out, “I told you to keep yer hair on!” and the audience erupts into laughter, some of it shocked.

“And last, but not least - May, you have the stage.”

The girl murmurs, “This is war,” and walks unsteadily to the centre stage. A long rope is lowered from somewhere unseen in the rafters towards her outstretched hands, and May begins to shimmy up. Very quickly she is just a speck, thirty feet or more above the audience.

“Big swizz,” Dani says loudly.

Without warning, something long and solid falls from the rope and the audience cries out. “It’s okay, just my leg!” calls down May, and a camera zooms in on a prosthetic limb. The audience breaks into relieved claps and sighs.

“Cheap gimmick.” Dani spits. Ricky and a nearby camera fix her with a disapproving eye.

May then twists upside down, holding herself steady with just one hand and the crook of her knee. The audience whistle and cheer. With her other hand, May rips off her hair and throws it into the crowd, following it up with, “Don’t worry, I’ve got alopecia!” There is a mixture of screaming and laughter.

Finally May is lowered to the floor and wobbling slightly, she stands on her single leg. The audiences break into a deafening torrent of applause and whoops. The camera pans to her triumphant face, beautiful even with the glass eyes.