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## Starspotting

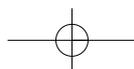
ZAZA JONES was numb with cold. Her fingers had turned pinkish-blue and her legs were covered in goosebumps. She'd tried stamping her feet countless times. And blowing hot air on the palms of her hands. But nothing seemed to warm her up.

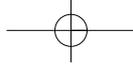
For the tenth time that morning Zaza cursed the stupid wardrobe department at *The Rise and Shine Saturday Show*. It was a freezing morning in early March and yet instead of kitting her out in thermal undies, fleece and woolly scarf, she looked as though she was off to the beach.

*The Rise and Shine Saturday Show* had two presenters. Zaza was the scatty blonde one. She wore a purple vest with her name emblazoned across it in white sequins, a tiny pair of pink shorts and lilac flip-flops. Didi Bell, Zaza's bossy older sidekick, had spiky red hair and was wearing her trademark huge silver hooped earrings. She was resplendent in a Union Jack mini skirt, scarlet star-spangled T-shirt and massive red platform heels.

Daniel Drewsome, the show's producer, put his head in his hands when the pair walked on to the set. What were these two like?

'Blooming heck,' he groaned to the floor manager. 'What the blazes do they think they're wearing? Their clothes are supposed to *complement* each other. Just looking at the pair of them is enough to give me a crashing headache. *And* they clash with the sofa. I think I'm going to have to go and lie down.'





Zaza and Didi glanced at the famous *Rise and Shine* sofa in horror. They'd taken so long to get ready – Didi had spent a record ninety minutes in hair and make-up – that everyone had forgotten the sofa was an unfortunate shade of pea green with giant yellow spots.

'Oh well,' said Daniel, shrugging his shoulders. 'It's too late to do anything about it now. We're on air in two minutes. You're both miked up, I take it?'

Didi nodded her assent with a gleaming smile. Inwardly, she was livid.

The viewers at home would never have guessed this in a million years, but the stars of *Rise and Shine* couldn't stand the sight of each other. Zaza had never forgiven Didi for spraying her with foam during an item about fire-fighting a few months back. Didi had sworn it was an accident but Zaza knew she was lying. For her part, Didi considered Zaza a complete waste of space.

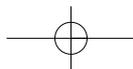
'She's as much use to *Rise and Shine* as a chocolate teapot,' she repeatedly told the crew backstage.

Every week the girls begged Daniel Drewsome to replace the other. Every week he shook his head and muttered something about their 'dazzling onscreen chemistry.'

'Dazzling' was exactly the right word for them today, thought Daniel as the nine a.m. news bulletin drew to a close and the cheery *Rise and Shine* theme tune burst into the nation's eardrums.

'Anyone got a pair of shades on them?' he asked one of the *Rise and Shine* team. 'Those outfits are making my eyes go all funny.'

*Rise and Shine* was easily the most popular programme on children's TV. It regularly pulled in five million viewers and Daniel was quietly confident that today's show would attract a bumper audience. Not only did the team have the usual mix of jokes, quizzes and celebrity



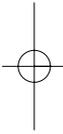


interviews lined up but most important of all, today Zaza and Didi were going to launch *Rise and Shine's* long-awaited Starspotter competition. That would really pull the punters in.

The grand announcement was timed for nine-thirty, halfway through the show. First the girls had to wade through an interview with a new boy band called Ladz (one of whom had severe laryngitis and could barely speak, let alone sing). Then came a custard-pie flinging competition (Didi claimed the one that narrowly missed Zaza was just a bad throw) and a live juggling lesson.

Finally the big moment arrived – along with a drum roll and tumultuous fanfare of trumpets.

‘*WANNA BE A STAR?*’ yelled Zaza, trying to sound as spontaneous and fun as possible. What the viewers didn’t know was that both girls read their words straight off the autocue, the sophisticated electronic device that flashed the script up in front of them.

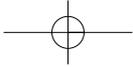


Zaza was determined not to make one of her famous blunders on this one. She still hadn’t lived down the embarrassment of one of her false eyelashes dropping off in the middle of last week’s programme. Didi had shrieked that Zaza had a big juicy spider crawling down her cheek and plucked it off with a flourish. Zaza had screamed so loudly that it was a miracle none of the camera lenses smashed. Worst of all, she’d completely lost track of what she was saying in the commotion. She’d spluttered and stuttered her way through the rest of the show, vowing to get her own back on Didi next time.

‘Yes,’ said Didi now, effortlessly following the autocue script. ‘If you want to be a pop star, just stick with *Rise and Shine* and we’ll tell you how to enter our brand-new Starspotter competition. It’s going to be mega ...’

Didi turned to Zaza to continue.

‘That’s right, Didi. Mega. We’re looking for talented



youngsters between the ages of eleven and fourteen who can sing like, er, er...'

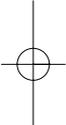
Out of the blue, Zaza was overcome by an attack of nerves. She blinked and struggled to find her place again.

What was she saying?

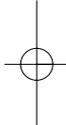
What on earth was she saying...?

To Zaza's horror, the words on the autocue had turned into one big blur, a blur that didn't make any sense.

'Come on, come on,' urged Daniel from the viewing gallery. 'What are we going to do with that wretched girl? She's driving me up the blinking wall. If she doesn't pull her socks up right now, she's out of here. There are thousands of kids out there desperate for her job.'



'Sing like angels,' said Didi, smoothly taking over Zaza's words. 'You must be able to dance your socks off and have zillions of personality. Our only rule is that you can't be a professional singer or dancer already. You must never have had a record released or performed on TV before and you must have the permission of a parent or guardian. Check on the *Rise and Shine* website for all the details. Now, the most important thing to remember is that we're holding two auditions. Both in the Easter holidays – so you don't have to worry about boring old school. The first is in Manchester on Monday April 7th. The second takes place in London on Thursday April 10th.'



Back on track – and furious that Didi had read *her* part of the script – Zaza immediately retaliated by nicking her co-presenter's next sentence.

'All you have to do is turn up at the following places and the following times,' she said, sneaking a sly look of triumph at Didi. Serve her right for being so mean.

As the venue details flashed onscreen, Didi hissed angrily at Zaza.

'You silly girl. What did you do that for? I was only helping you out.'



‘No you weren’t,’ whispered Zaza. ‘You were doing your best to make me look like a prize idiot...’

‘Well, you don’t need any help from me on that score,’ murmured Didi. She shot Zaza a withering glance. ‘You’re doing a pretty good job of it yourself. *And* your bra strap’s showing...’

Zaza looked as if she was about to burst into tears but as the camera switched back to the girls once more, she bit her lip and managed to restrain herself. She wasn’t going to give Didi the satisfaction of making her cry. Not again.

‘Now,’ said Didi. ‘I know all of you budding pop stars will want to know what’s in store for our lucky winners.’

‘And that’s when things start getting really exciting,’ butted in Zaza just a fraction too fast. She was so anxious to stop Didi monopolising the script that she was gabbling her words now.

‘*SLOW DOWN,*’ yelled Daniel in Zaza’s earpiece, making her jump with fright.

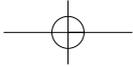
‘We’re not just looking for one star,’ she said, slowing to a snail’s pace. ‘*We – are – looking – for – five – stars.*’

Didi glanced at Zaza. What was the matter with the girl? She wasn’t Zaza’s number one fan, that was for sure, but she didn’t usually sound such a blithering imbecile. Why couldn’t she speak at a normal speed? She was either jabbering so fast she was incomprehensible or she was drawing out e-v-e-r-y single syllable.

‘The judges – and they’ll include the top producers, songwriters, dancers and choreographers in the business – are going to choose *five* new stars,’ said Didi. ‘That’s right, I said five. Some from the London auditions. And some from Manchester.’

Didi flashed her perfect white teeth winningly at the nearest camera, waiting for Zaza to take up her next cue.

In fact Zaza was miles away, day-dreaming about what she’d like to do to Didi after the programme. Ram a



blooming *Cornetto* in her face, perhaps, or shove her precious Union Jack mini skirt in a bright blue wash. All of a sudden she felt a bony elbow in her ribs.

‘It’s you,’ hissed Didi.

‘Er, er, yes,’ mumbled Zaza. She searched frantically down the rolling script. Where on earth had they got to? She’d lost her place again.

‘From “five,”’ prompted Didi again. ‘Right in the middle of the screen ...’

Zaza glanced suspiciously at her co-host. She could see the word ‘five’ on the autocue all right but how could she be sure Didi wasn’t trying to land her in it as usual?

Still, it was a risk she was going to have to take.

‘That’s right,’ said Zaza. ‘Five. We are looking for five stars. And when we’ve chosen them we’re going to take our five young stars off to a secluded hideaway in the wilds of...’

Zaza tapped her nose conspiratorially.

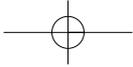
‘In the wilds of ...’

‘... A-ha ... now that would be telling,’ said Didi. ‘But what’s important is that our five star winners will get to spend ten days at a mystery location during the summer holidays.’

‘They’ll be coached by the best people in showbiz,’ said Zaza. ‘We’ve got them all lined up.’

‘Wicked,’ grinned Didi. ‘So come on all you budding singers and dancers ... You’d better get practising your tunes and dance routines and we’ll look forward to seeing you in Manchester and London. We can’t wait, can we, Zaza?’

Looking down on the two girls from the viewing gallery, Daniel’s face burst into a rare smile. For the first time in months, Zaza and Didi were working in tandem. Call him a soft-hearted fool, but the pair of them looked as though they quite liked each other.



The producer didn't see what happened once the credits began to roll. Didi wrenched off the tiny microphone hidden down her T-shirt and, confident that no one in the studio could hear her, spluttered: 'By the end of the Starspotter competition, Zaza Fishface Jones, there's going to be one presenter hosting this show and it's certainly not going to be you...'

As the tears streamed softly down Zaza's cheeks, Didi turned on her heel and flounced off the set.

