

CHAPTER TWO

**MISSING GLASSES
AND
NASTY LASSES**

“Please welcome to the stage, Rose Falvey!” boomed a very different Master of Ceremonies, for the stage in question was that of Mountford High School, Bashingford (just off the M3), and we are no longer in the sixth century but the twenty-first (when YOU live).

Mountford High School was having its very own version of the TV programme called *Britain’s Got Talented People*, imaginatively entitled *Mountford’s Got Talented People*. There had been qualifying heats throughout the

spring term, and now there were only two chances left to reach the grand final next term.

Rose Falvey didn’t want to wait for the last heat, the last chance – that would be too much pressure. She was pumped for this, NOW. So pumped, in fact, that on hearing her name from the wings, she sprang on to the stage like a gazelle and overshot her spotlight mark. The spotlight then had to try and find her again, while Rose ran around in a panic trying to find the spotlight in return.

None of this was helped by the fact Rose was without her much-needed glasses. She’d decided that they didn’t go with her outfit: a skin-tight leopard-skin onesie like one she’d seen Beyoncé wearing in a YouTube video. In hindsight, this was a bad decision, as now she couldn’t see

a darn thing. She dashed around the stage, glimpsing nothing but a blur of faces and the occasional blinding light. By now, the crowd were giggling loudly.

It wasn't a good start.

By the time Rose finally found her light, she was breathing heavily. She still felt positive, however, of giving a fantastic rendition of Beyoncé's "Crazy in Love".

Rose had inherited her dad's endless positivity. He had always told her that as long as you tried your best, it was impossible to fail. She had practised for this moment in front of a mirror every night for three weeks. If what her dad said was true, which it usually was, this was bound to go well.

The music started.

**"O-oh O-oh O O O O wah
O-oh-O-oh -oh -oh -oh -oh!"**

From the moment she began to sing, Rose felt something was wrong. When she sang at home it was within the muffled confines of her bedroom, her only audience her yellow guinea pig, Bubbles. After merely an hour of rehearsing, her older brother Kris had insisted she closed the door and wore headphones so he didn't have to listen to the song over and over again and go crazy himself. Now, onstage, singing out loud for the first time, she felt strangely exposed, like one of those dreams where you end up at school with no clothes on.

"Oh yeah you got me so crazy in love, yes I'm crazy in love! O-oh o-oh etc."

Rose started her dance moves. She figured that

if her singing voice didn't wow the crowd, she could always rely on her superb dancing.

In her room she had quickly realised that she couldn't dance like Beyoncé. Who could? Therefore, Rose had invented her own routine. Her signature move, the one she was most proud of, was 'the high kick'. It was as it sounds: a super-high kick that almost went higher than her block of frizzy red hair that sat atop her head in bunches.

She let loose some high kicks now, followed by some 'spins'. Rose was proud of these too. They were really just an extension of the high kick. When the elevated leg came down, she would swing it across and behind her standing leg, using the centrifugal force to send her upper body into a spin.

Getting into the spin was easy. Getting out was always problematic, however, even in her bedroom. And as Rose now couldn't see very well, she kept finding herself exiting the spins facing the BACK of the stage, then having to track down the audience again in time for the next bit.

It gives me no pleasure to tell you, reader, that eventually, the combination of out-of-tune singing, manic high kicking and wonky spins took their toll on the audience. Soon, loud gales of laughter began to spread through the auditorium. "HEE HEE! HA HA, HA HA HA HA HAAAAA!" When the song finally ended, even the three judges (three fully grown adult teachers, mind!) couldn't keep straight faces.

"If that had been a comedy act, you'd have got

top marks, Rose,” said Mr Culkin (head judge and maths teacher) eventually. The other judges were too busy laughing even to speak.

Rose made her way from the stage and into the schoolyard, feeling completely embarrassed. You could have fried an egg on her cheeks, they were so hot and red. She tried to pull herself together. What did Mr Culkin know about music anyway? He thought Stormzy was a type of weather front. She’d endured embarrassment before. She would get through this blip.

The last thing she needed to see, however, were the **CAT**s walking towards her.

Catrina, Andrea and Tamsin were three of the most odious twelve-year-olds you’d ever wish to meet. They were collectively known as the CATs, because of their names and because they

had claws. Nasty ones. Metaphorically speaking, anyway. And now they had made their way out of the auditorium specifically to get those claws into poor Rose.

“Hey, frizzpot,” said Katrina, who wore too much make-up. “Nice moves!” She then did her own little high kick by way of parody. Rose couldn’t help noticing that it wasn’t even knee height, never mind hair height.

“Your audition from hell just went viral,” Tamsin sneered. Tamsin had brains, but didn’t like to use them.

She shoved her brand new smartphone in Rose’s face and pressed ‘play’ on a video.



Rose saw the grainy footage of herself high kicking and singing in a voice which seemed even worse than she remembered. The video had been liked over seven hundred times already.

Andrea (Andie for short) joined in. She was

the muscle behind the CATs, looking more like a wrestler than a schoolgirl and towering head and shoulders above even the boys. “You need singing lessons, you frizzy-haired freckle-mouse.”

“Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me,” reasoned Rose. This was another lesson her dad had taught her. He’d told her to say this to bullies to stop them in their tracks, or at least confuse them long enough to make her escape.

“Have it your way,” replied Andie, before casually picking up a stick and hurling it at Rose. The stick struck Rose square on the forehead.

THUD!

“OW!” yelped Rose.

But even in her agony, she had to give Andie some respect. Of all the times she'd used her dad's 'sticks and stones' line, Rose had never once realised she was actually giving her enemies a useful piece of advice.

Mind you, why am I surprised? she thought, a hot soup of anger and sadness bubbling inside her. Hadn't her dad also told her that as long as you tried your best, it was impossible to fail? He'd been wrong about that too.

Suddenly every piece of advice her beloved dad had ever given her seemed to be crumbling into dust beneath her feet.

*And then Rose ran,
speeding through the gears,
she fled the cackling CATs
so they could not see her tears.*