

Optimism

by Matt Potter

A full house watched me. "Michelle ... is there a Michelle here?"

A woman, blonde hair ratty and long, raised her hand.

"Byron? Brian? Someone 'B'... ?"

"Brian, yeah." She blinked back tears. "What's he saying?"

She looked so hopeful, flanked by people she didn't know. She'd probably gone without cigarettes for a month to scrape the money together for a ticket.

I closed my eyes to listen harder. "He's very raspy, he's having problems breathing."

"That's asthma," she said. "Tell him to use his puffer."

I paused in case she said more. Then, "He's very faint but he wants to talk."

She leaned forward, chin almost resting on the grey-haired woman in front of her. "Tell him to shout."

"He wants you to —"

"What?" she said, hands out. "What? I need to know."

I touched my forehead. "He's trying to get through but something's blocking him."

"If it's the dog tell him to kick it out of the way," she said.

Audience members gasped.

"The dog died in the same crash," she added.

Faces turned to me again.

Michelle's eyes narrowed.

But the voice was so faint.

"Was it an accident?" she said. "Was it on purpose?"

I put my hand up to stop her.

"Ask him. I need to know for the insurance."

The audience gasped again.

"So then I can go to Bali for four weeks."

"I'm getting something," I said.

"What?!"

The voice shone through. "He's telling you to shut up."

