

NEW FICTION / STUDIO PANEL

The programme that cannot end

R pp. 62-64, 74-77; new fictional studio dialogue.

Rachel checks the microphone. Baby V checks the cue cards. Zara checks the fire exits, having been informed that tonight's guest is only coming in to say one thing.

RACHEL Good evening, sayang, and welcome to Mama, Satu Lagi! The programme whose closing credits are legally a suggestion.

BABY V Tonight we have philosophy, friendship, a missing chip, and a man who announced a shower before commissioning an entire publishing house.

ZARA The shower is our outside broadcast. We have not received a signal.

ALFRED Production note: I am the machine at the desk. The girls are fictional hosts. The source pages are real supplied documents. The kettle is currently the most qualified person here.

RACHEL And our guest?

The guest chair holds a captain's cap and an open book. A small card reads: KAPTEN. BACK AFTER ONE MORE THING.

BABY V He has outsourced his entrance.

ZARA Sensible. His exit has been in development for several hours.

Rachel lifts the little plate on the desk. One crisp catches the studio light.

RACHEL Before we begin, nobody eats the emotionally significant potato.

ALFRED Shall I label it?

ZARA Please don't. The last label became a doctorate.

The applause sign comes on. Underneath it, a smaller sign lights up: LAUNDRY STILL WAITING.



AT THE DESK

The source gets its turn at the microphone.

FICTIONAL STAGE CUTAWAY

Rachel has arranged fourteen cue cards in a graceful fan. Baby V adds a fifteenth. Zara turns the fan into a clipboard.

RACHEL Everyone gets a point of view tonight.

ALFRED Everyone whose words we actually have gets a source clip. The people who have not replied get an empty chair, not an invented answer.

BABY V Can the empty chair have a biscuit?

ZARA It has shown remarkable restraint. Give it two.

RACHEL We have Hykarl's account, the mixed voices from his calls, Rachel's recorded responses, the supplied Grok exchange, and Alfred's reading. Nobody is required to agree with the furniture.

BABY V Especially this sofa. It has supported several questionable decisions.

The camera finds a velvet cushion with a small golden leaf resting on it. Zara moves it to the desk. Rachel moves it back. Baby V watches both of them with mounting professional interest.

ALFRED Is this part of the show?

RACHEL It is a continuity problem.

ZARA It is about to become a geography problem.

BABY V Lovely. We've been on air for one minute and already changed faculties.

The music swells. Rachel smiles into the lens, a little too pleased with herself.

RACHEL Kapten, get comfortable. You asked for a pretty book. Unfortunately, it has learned to talk back.

The empty chair receives the first round of applause.



AT THE DESK

The girls keep the reader company between lines.

FICTIONAL STAGE CUTAWAY