WORSE OFF

Written by

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INT. TV STUDIO - NIGHT

The antsy AUDIENCE in their seats. Each person holds a signaling device. Bright lights cover the stage. CAMERAS everywhere. An air of anticipation fills the studio.

Onto the stage comes a middle-aged EMCEE, big smile and carefully styled hair. The crowd breaks into APPLAUSE, and the Emcee takes a bow.

EMCEE
Thank you, thank you. Welcome to a special episode of Worse Off, the show that allows you, the audience, to vote for misery.

APPLAUSE.

EMCEE
Tonight’s subject? The self-inflicted. That’s right, the self-inflicted. Isn’t that exciting?

APPLAUSE

EMCEE
You know how the show works. The studio audience has signaling devices, and you people at home can participate by calling the numbers on the screen. Remember, your vote counts. So, don’t be shy. Now, are you ready for round one?

APPLAUSE

EMCEE
Me too. Let’s meet Worse Off contestant number one. From Greenville, Oklahoma, welcome Steve.

Onto the stage comes STEVE, 30, middle of the middle, in jeans and plaid shirt. What’s obvious is a missing left hand, cut off at the elbow. He waves and smiles as the audience APPLAUDS.

The Emcee takes Steve’s right hand in his, and Steve awkwardly lays his stub on top.
EMCEE
(breaking the shake)
Steve, Steve, the audience loves
you already. So, what is your
story?

STEVE
Thank you for having me. And a
shout out to my wife Jaydell and
our son Stevie.

EMCEE
I’m sure they’re watching and
voting.

STEVE
Roger that. Yeah, well, I guess it
began when I was nine.

EMCEE
What began?

STEVE
The problems with my left hand.

EMCEE
Go on.

STEVE
You see, I knew right then that my
left hand didn’t really belong to
me, if you know what I mean. It
was foreign, and it didn’t do what
I wanted it to do. I fought with
it for years because that’s what
you’re supposed to do, right?
Until I couldn’t stand it any more.
I told my wife, Jaydell. I said,
Jaydell, it’s coming off.

EMCEE
And what did you do?

STEVE
What I had to do. I grabbed my
hatchet, laid my arm on the
chopping block, and swung as hard
as I could.

EMCEE
Oh my, that must have really hurt.
STEVE
Well, I had pretty much tied off the upper arm, so there wasn’t a whole lot of blood. But despite the pain, I felt relief. Like a giant boulder had been lifted off my shoulders.

EMCEE
And then what, Steve?

STEVE
I guess you might call it shoe lace reality. All of a sudden I couldn’t tie my shoes or my son’s shoes. I had to sell my Harley cause I didn’t have a left hand. Jaydell went cold cause she likes two hands if you know what I mean. My life went to hell.

EMCEE
I’m sure it did, which is why you’re here tonight. OK, Steve, we get the message. Thank you.

He holds up his stub, and the crowd goes crazy.

EMCEE
There you have it. Our first contestant, Steve.

With a wave, Steve walks off the stage.

EMCEE
And now for contestant number two. From Ridgetown, Maine, a big hand for Beatrice.

As the crowd claps, BEATRICE, 40, thickish, ordinary, uses crutches to get across the stage. She’s missing her right leg. She reaches the Emcee and raises a crutch to the crowd, which causes her to lose her balance and fall into the Emcee’s arms.

EMCEE
Oops. Let me help.

BEATRICE
Sorry.

He gets her balanced and steps away nonplused.
EMCEE
Welcome to Worse Off, Beatrice. How are you tonight?

BEATRICE
I’m doing fine. And I want to say hey to my sister Ruth and my dog Panther.

EMCEE
Quite a name for a dog. So, are you ready to tell your story?

BEATRICE
Yes sir.

The Emcee motions for her to begin.

BEATRICE
I suppose it must sound weird. I mean, I cut off my own leg for no good reason, and that’s weird by anyone’s lights. But you see, it wasn’t weird. I was meant to be one-legged. My earliest memories and dreams were always about wanting to be one-legged. The whole idea of having only one leg seemed beautiful to me. So, one day, I grabbed my father’s hack saw, drove the van to the hospital parking lot, and opened up the back. I spread out plastic and started sawing. When I was done, I called 911. Took only a minute to get me into surgery.

EMCEE
And what then, Beatrice?

BEATRICE
I suppose I hadn’t thought it through cause right away things changed. I couldn’t walk without crutches. I couldn’t drive my stick-shift car. My fiance dumped me after we tried to walk the beach together. And there is no fashion for one-legged people. No pants or dresses or even shoes.

EMCEE
There you have it, folks. Beatrice and the misery of one leg.
Emcee waves Beatrice off the stage.

EMCEE
You have Steve who lost his left hand.

Steve’s face appears on the screen.

EMCEE
And Beatrice who lost her right leg.

Beatrice’s face appears next to Steve.

EMCEE
Is everyone READY?

AUDIENCE
READY!

EMCEE
Fifteen seconds to vote. To choose who is WORSE OFF. Starting right now!

A timer appears on the screen above Steve and Beatrice. Below, appear the number of votes for each. As the timer counts down, the votes trend for Beatrice.

EMCEE
It looks like...I think...yes, it’s Beatrice! Beatrice will be moving on to round 2. Come on, give it up for Beatrice.

The faces and numbers disappear as the audience APPLAUDS.

EMCEE
Well, well, well, I can see you appreciate the problems of having only one leg. So, let’s get into round two where Beatrice will face off with RACHEL!

Onto the stage comes RACHEL, blind, tapping the way with her cane. The Emcee crosses to her, and she smacks him in she shin with her cane.

EMCEE
Ow, hold on there.

RACHEL
Sorry.
EMCEE
Just take my arm.

RACHEL
Thank you.

He places her on her spot and turns her to the camera.

EMCEE
Rachel is from Teluka, Florida. Tell us something about your life, Rachel.

RACHEL
Well, I live with mother, Polly, and my brother, Ralph, and my pet pig, Oliver.

EMCEE
You think they’re watching tonight?

RACHEL
Oh yes, they never miss a show.

EMCEE
Neither do we.

Audience chuckles.

EMCEE
OK, Rachel, when you’re ready. Your story.

RACHEL
My story begins when I was fifteen and started to watch the news every day. You know, CNN and Fox and Drudge and, well, I was watching and reading news twenty-four seven. And all I saw was misery. Shootings, rapes, bombings, blood and more blood. It got so I couldn’t stand it. I wanted to stop, but I couldn’t. I was a junkie. I tried to stop lots of times, but I always went back. The only way to stop was to go blind. So, with the help of my brother Ralph, I doused my eyes with acid.
EMCEE
Ouch! Truly a telling story, Rachel, truly. What do you think now?

RACHEL
Being blind is awful. No TV, no internet, I can’t even tell night from day. Walking down the street is an obstacle course with joggers and bikers and skateboards. Even a little dog can trip me up. And you wouldn’t believe how sore my fingers get from reading braille.

EMCEE
That sounds like pain, real pain.

He helps Rachel off the stage.

EMCEE
You heard her, people. What do you think?

The audience APPLAUDS and HOOTS.

EMCEE
My sentiments exactly. And now it’s time for round 2 of Worse Off. On one hand we have Beatrice.

Beatrice’s face appears on screen.

EMCEE
And on the other we have Rachel.

Rachel’s face appears on the screen.

EMCEE
Before we go any further, I have to remind the voters that tonight’s winner will receive fifty thousand dollars, a new car, and two weeks in sunny Cancun, Mexico.

The Audience APPLAUDS.

EMCEE
That’s right, so vote wisely. OK, time to choose the next winner. Who will it be? Beatrice? (APPLAUSE) Or Rachel? (APPLAUSE) (MORE)
EMCEE (CONT'D)

Your fifteen seconds start right now!

The timer appears on the screen, along with vote counts for Beatrice and Rachel.

EMCEE
Tonight’s special edition of Worse Off is sponsored by Kure-All medical devices. Kure-All for everything you’re missing in life.

The timer winks out. Rachel is the winner.

EMCEE
My, my, the results speak for themselves. Rachel has won round two and will go on to round three.

APPLAUSE

EMCEE
Before we introduce our next story, I want to take a moment to thank each and every person who logged into our web site and filled out an application. Your voices were heard. And if you weren’t chosen for tonight’s show, don’t give up. Log on, update your file, and tell us just how bad things are. You might be just the misery we’re looking for.

APPLAUSE

EMCEE
When I read about our next contestant, I knew, just knew he was made for Worse Off. From San Rafael California, let’s hear it for Zander.

Onto the stage comes ZANDER, strapped into a wheelchair. A quadriplegic, he moves the wheelchair by blowing into a tube.

The Emcee leads the APPLAUSE as Zander does a fancy spin in the middle of the stage and tips over the wheelchair, leaving him lying on the floor.

The crowd goes CRAZY!

FADE OUT.