

**YOU CAN BREAK HER BACK
BUT NOT HER SPIRIT**

Irirangi Te Motu
NZ On Air

SPINAL DESTINATION



PUSHING COMEDY IN A WHOLE NEW DIRECTION



IN A SPLIT SECOND, JOURNALIST TESSA RIVERS' LIFE CHANGES...



Created by **Paula Whetu Jones**, award winning writer and director of some of Aotearoa New Zealand's most important works. Having made documentaries highlighting social issues, such as *Gang Girls*, *Street Kids* and *Silent Soldiers*, and feature films *Whina* and *Waru*, Paula turns her hand to a confronting comedy about disability.

Tessa Rivers had everything going for her: fit, healthy, acclaimed journalist, mum to Poppy, and partner to Karl. When a mysterious illness leaves her paralysed, Tessa is sent to Goldfield's Spinal Unit for tests and therapy. After meeting the residents and staff, Tessa is motivated even more to walk out of there.

As doubts creep in, Tessa's hyper-critical inner voice manifests as a pre-paralysed bitchier version of herself: Walking Tessa. Resisting the advice of Dr. Todd, Tessa keeps working to hit a deadline, hiding her condition from her employers. When her overeager underling Candace tracks her down, Tessa admits defeat, handing over her unfinished work.

Tessa forms a tentative friendship with John, a curmudgeonly middle-aged tetraplegic. Less unity is shared with wide-eyed teenaged Ed, and Dan the annoying 'pot plant' enthusiast. As Tessa's rage, denial and grief about her situation spill over, she repeatedly finds herself at the centre of conflict. Refusing to adjust, Tessa chooses rebellion at every turn. Tessa upsets Poppy when she breaks a promise, and Karl begins to grow distant.

After weeks of tension, Dr. Todd discharges Tessa. If she doesn't think they can help, she is free to leave. An elated Tessa is shoved out into the world, then abandoned by Walking Tessa. Alone, she realises she has no plan if she can't walk. After a tearful phone conversation with Poppy, she admits defeat and returns.

The gang's attempt to cheer Ed up with a surprise birthday party fails, but a determined Tessa convinces everyone to bust out to a local pub for a proper party. After a fraught escape, they finally reach their destination. It's a win until Tessa spots Karl with another woman. She sits out the back with John, defeated until Walking Tessa appears reminding her of the plan, to walk.

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