

# Twist and Shout

## A Fan Fic Story

### Chapter 1

Dot lifted her eyes from the pages of her book. There were now only three other passengers on the bus; a silver-haired business man with a critical scowl, a young inked bogun, and a skittish woman biting every nail on her left hand down to the quick. In the driver's seat was a man – middle-aged, indigenous – who had been singing along to every radio song that had garbled its way through the overhead speakers. Dot was impressed with his very eclectic interest in music – meanwhile, the others on board didn't do much for her at all.

The business man complained about everything – the noise, the smell and the speed of the bus; the woman's whimpering; the bogun's lack of dress sense; Dot's choice of reading material; and the fact that the driver had a dog sitting up the front with him who barked along every time a Jimmy Barnes song came on – which was quite often.

The bogun – sporting an intricate tattoo of a scarecrow on his scrawny bicep – was highly annoying. Especially the way he tried to loudly guess the artist of each radio song and without fail got it wrong, even when the song was a repeat.

The nail-biter – eyes continually darting from one person to another like a cornered rat fearing for its life – made her anxious.

Dot checked her watch and let out a groan. Yet another hour before she reached her destination. She peered through the smeared window glass. Dark clouds were forming in the afternoon sky, blocking the sun and shadowing the flat, treeless landscape. Though the terrain was in desperate need of rain, she hoped it wouldn't delay their time of arrival. Other than escaping the claustrophobic interior and the dismal company of odd strangers, she couldn't wait to see her Aunt Emily and Uncle Harry and their farm. Country living – if only for the holiday break from Uni – was just what she needed.

A cry of objection burst from the bogan's partially toothed mouth, as the bus driver changed the radio station. 'Geez Louise, I nearly had it that time,' he whined, 'on the tip-a-me bloody tongue it was.'

A weather report crackled through the speakers. It didn't sound good. A super cell storm was approaching.

Dot glanced outside. It was getting darker, and the wind had picked up, stirring the dust into whirling willy-willies. Her pulse quickened and she wiped sweating palms over her denim shorts.

The woman began to wail and the businessman threw up his hands. 'For God's sake! Will you shut the hell up you sook!'

The bogun turned to face him. 'Hey, pull yer head in ya heartless bastard. Can't ya see she's petrified!'

'That's 'petrified' you idiot,' the man responded, shaking his head.

The younger jumped to his feet. 'What was that smart arse? You sayin I'm dumb or sumfin? I bet ya think yar shit don't stink.'

'At least I don't have shit for brains,' the older man said coldly.

Tattooed muscles flexed and fists were raised. 'Hey, cruisin for a bruising are ya?'

Though at a loss as to what an eighteen-year-old girl like her could actually do to stop an escalation of violence, Dot left her seat and made her way down the aisle.

A blinding flash, instantly followed by a deafening clap of thunder, broke the tension instead. Everyone either yelped or swore, or did both. The bus quickly pulled to the side of the road.

'I think we'd better prepare for the worst,' said the driver, pointing to the vista from the front window.

Four pairs of feet shuffled forward. Everyone looked out, mouths dropping open like drawbridges and hair standing on end like tentacles in the electrified air. A cluster of heavy clouds had collided, and was forming into a mega storm. It billowed and evolved

into a colossal beast right before their eyes. Then it folded in on itself and began to rotate, moving towards them with increasing speed.

The woman screamed, the dog howled, and the driver commanded everyone to take a seat and fasten their seatbelts. They quickly did as they were told and clung onto armrests with white knuckled fingers as the bus was buffeted by thick waves of curling dust. It rocked, it jerked, it trembled, and then lifted off the ground. The view from each window was a wall of grey. Every face paled. Then the bus began to spin, mid air.

Dot shut her eyes. It was like she was on a crazy carnival ride, or in a washing machine during the spin cycle. The bus twisted around, and around, and around. She was on the verge of vomiting and let out a shout, calling for heavenly aid. Then there was darkness.

When she came to, Dot was still seated, but out in the open and separate to the bus. The sky was blue—the storm had passed. Dot shook her head clear of cobwebs, wriggled each limb to see if they were still intact and spied the bus. It was a twisted wreck lying like a discarded piece of junk in the dirt nearby. *Were there any other survivors?* She unbuckled her seat belt and hobbled over on shoeless feet.

On a quick inspection Dot found no one, except a pair of red Blundstones sticking out from under the wreckage. She gave them a tug and they came free. Fortunately no feet or legs or person was attached, but inside one boot was a note. Scribbled in blue ink were the words:

*Search for the others  
Help them each discover what they are in need of  
Then find me  
- The Driver*

*PS follow the rainbow serpent  
PPS Watch out for the evil bitch from the West*

Dot looked around—there was nothing but desert. *How one earth was she to know which way to go?*

Suddenly there was a bark and the driver's fox terrier appeared from amidst the wreckage. It rushed over, wagging its tail. Dot gave it a cuddle and fingered the metal disk attached to the collar.

‘Well hello there Toto, I’m Dot,’ she said, and the dog licked her hand in response. She studied the piece of notepaper and eyed their surroundings. ‘O my God. How are we supposed to find a rainbow serpent?’

Toto barked and scurried off, stopping at a lone boulder rising from the dust.

Dot stepped into the red work boots and made her way over.

The rock face was smattered with aboriginal art—swirls and dots and handprints and . . . a colourful snake. It was stretched out and pointing with its forked tongue to Dot’s right. Dot turned in that direction and shaded her eyes to peer into the distance. It could have been her imagination, or a shimmering mirage, but it could also be a town she saw glimmering on the horizon.

‘Okay Toto,’ she sighed, ‘what other choices do we have? Lets see what’s out there.’

*(Vicki Stevens)*

## Chapter 2

Seized by a strange concoction of determination and trepidation, Dot strode on in the stifling heat as best she could toward the shimmering mirage, as though she knew precisely what she was doing.

Toto barked in rapid succession around her legs, itching for a play and pleased as Punch to be on his way, on this new adventure with his new favourite human. He was almost tripping her up, and the Blundstones didn't help – they were a little big for Dot. She actually would have preferred Doc Martens - but still red ones. *Red ones!*

The atmosphere had taken on technicolour hues! They were over the rainbow! Gone were the sepia tones she had known all her life, and the world could have looked amazing, apart from the fact that this world was strangely ochre and blue with occasional patches of brown and greyish green. But still, it *was* an amazing place. A delicious thrill gripped her. She felt the world had suddenly awoken from its hibernation, from its washed out pedestrian banality, and had swept her and Toto up in an exclusive little parcel for what they both hoped would be the ride of a lifetime.

They walked, and walked, and walked - fly after fly, after damn annoying little black sticky fly. (Dot wished she had an Akubra to go with her shoes.) The closer they got to the shimmering mirage, the more golden it appeared. Even though still obviously many miles away, Dot's face screwed in confusion as a familiar form appeared. It was indeed a giant letter 'M'. *No, it can't be*, she thought. . . then promptly resumed humming *Flame Trees* accompanied by Toto barking where the drums should be.

As they trekked along, something made Dot turn to look back. Running towards them was a fit-looking woman poured from head to toe into a shiny green and yellow body suit. Her pleasant indigenous face peered out from a cleaved portion of the suit. The woman carried a conical-shaped object with an impressive flame burning at its crown. Dot stared at her as she slowed her pace and approached. Toto simply wagged his tail. Dot could hear the woman mumbling:

'The stupid thing didn't light properly. And to top it all off, someone stole my bloody suit.'

Then, as though suddenly realizing the gravity of what she was meant to do, the

woman stopped, looked the girl in the eye and proclaimed in solemn tones through panting breath:

'Remember, when you reach your destination you will be asked: 'Do you want fries with that? You must answer: 'No, of course I flamin' well don't! I would have asked for them if I did. Don't you sell enough of the things?'

She shook her head, as if to shake the dust from her ears, then returned to declare more cathartic words, her little audience of Dot and Toto staring at her in wonder and expectation:

'Whenever you are in trouble, I will appear to help you. For I am Cathy, the Good Witch of the North. Keep your Blundstones close to your feet. The driver you seek waits for you at your destination. Alas, he is always there these days...

Another head shake, then: 'Your search will lead you to your friends. Only the driver can help them to help themselves, unless their problems are diet-related.'

She pulled Dot aside and whispered confidentially to her: 'You will find the driver has health problems.'

Then louder, she continued: 'The Evil Bitch from the West knows you are here and will seek you out. He assumes the form of an entertainer and he rides a giant chariot not dissimilar to your previous one. It bears the name of the wife of Elvis. Beware - he will seduce you with his velvety, treacle-coated vocals...

The woman stopped at that point, staring dazed and confused out into the never-never.

She gave her head some further quick flicks, then once again picked up her trail, as though she had never halted:

... and try to trick you with his shenanigans. And remember, the path of the serpent is not a straight one!'

And with those parting words, holding her torch high and proud, the witch ran off in a direction Dot could only assume was north.

Dot heard loud shouting at a distance behind them. Toto got wind of the commotion,

barked furiously, and turned to run towards its source.

'Come back, Toto!' Dot cried.

Dot turned to see Toto running towards a flurry of dust with three people at its core, two of them throwing punches. Between blows, they were talking:

'I tell ya. If we can just stop the boats...' said a bow-legged, athletic though scrawny-looking man. He was wearing budgie-smugglers and sprouting a tattoo of a scarecrow on his forearm. Dot noticed that what was left of his teeth looked like tombstones.

'Stupid Arssie. It's a wal you need - one high enough to keep the bastards out, particularly the southerners!' said a man in a business suit with what looked to be a ginger rug on his head. He scowled yet rolled his eyes as he spoke - convinced his wall would work in his country, but here, in Australia? He was enjoying taking the piss...

'Hmm, yes yes, I guess we could build a wall around Australia.' replied the silly athlete.

'You STUPID IDIOT!' roared the man in the business suit. 'How d'ya s'pose ya'll build a wall around 26,000 kilometres of coastline?'

'Well, I'll stop the boats then. You'll see.'

'Oh, grow a brain.'

The business man went in for one more punch. Toto went for the budgie-smugglers.

'Oh please, just stop. I can handle sacking workers with a flick of the pen but this is too much. None of this is my fault!' whined a rather rotund man who promptly stuck his fingernails in his mouth, chewing them ardently to the quick.

'Stop fighting, tell me who you all are and what you want here!' demanded Dot.

The rotund man cowered and whimpered: 'I'm Clive and I... I just want to hide.'

'I'm Donald and I want to be President of the United States. I don't like people unless they are on my team. Are YOU on my team, little girl?'

Dot shuddered and ignored him. 'And you?' she asked the scraggy athlete.

'I'm Tony and I can stop the boats!'

'You stupid idiot!' roared Donald. 'Yer not even Prime Minister anymore!'

'STOP! We must find the driver!' Dot lamented, then added under her breath: 'But I fear you're all lost causes.'

A strange whooshing sound in the distant sky halted their conversation. What looked like drones came hurtling towards them, causing the group to duck and weave around the missiles, until they suddenly noticed what they were.

'It's a Mac attack!' cried Donald as a multitude of chicken nuggets descended upon them.

'Oooh! My favourite!' cried Clive, greedily guzzling each one as soon as it hit him. They all tucked in to what was left.

Dot realized she would need to keep them all a short leash as they continued on their way. *What a peculiar bunch.* Feeling somewhat sated but thirstier than ever, Dot pondered the words of the Good Witch, wondering why the road to the Driver would not be straight, wondering when the Evil Bitch from the West would show his face, wondering why they didn't get cheese burgers, fries and Cokes too... She shuddered at the fearful thought of never finding water out here, and with a thud feared just how lost they might be.

Suddenly a bus appeared in the distance, moving towards them. It had long, flowing scarves streaming from its top. Above the rattle, chug and splutter, they could hear a male voice, the smooth voice of a particularly proficient tenor singing: *I still call Australia home.* Several warbling magpies encircled the bus, joining in the cheery chorus. Dot imagined the performance was a sweet serenade just for her. As the bus pulled up beside the group, Dot clearly saw the writing on its side: *Pricilla.*

She started, shuddering in terror as she realized who they would soon be meeting – the Evil Bitch from the West!

(Jane Ireland)



### Chapter 3

Oh well at least there was safety in numbers, but to her horror as she looked behind and realised that everyone had disappeared. Poof just vanished into thin air, in a cloud of desert sand. All, except for her new best friend, Toto thank goodness! Where they just really a figment of her imagination she wondered? No time to worry about it she had lots to do and above all she needed to find the farm and her beloved Aunt Emily and Uncle Harry.

Dot picked Toto up and held him closely and braced herself to meet her destiny, which was approaching to her at a supersonic speed. She heard the screech of the brakes as the bus stopped with amazing precision right in front of her with only inches to spare. The door was immediately swung open and Dot was assaulted with a menagerie of fluffy, feathers boas, a dazzling array of costume jewellery and nauseatingly sweet musk perfume. She crooked her neck to meet steely blue eyes which were framed by the longest eyelashes she had ever seen. Dot had never in her whole 18 years, ever seen anyone quite like this before. For in front of her stood a giant of a woman or was it a man...oh well whatever!!! It was draped in layers and layers of rainbow-coloured chiffon and feather boas. On top of its head was an ornate head dress that vaguely resembled a chicken, it looked hideous but somehow matched the rest of the outfit. Dot had to look away to refrain herself from giggling. "Hello daaaarling" said a deep voice, smooth as a well-aged scotch. "Oh you poor little thing, you look like you are lost and in need of some TLC" Come, come we has lots of refreshments and a nice air conditioned bus" and then Dot thought she heard him or her whisper "my what nice shoes you are wearing dear" Dot composed herself and with what little voice she had left, due to the dehydration and fatigue, weakly said "thank you"

Really what choice did she have? Stuck out here in the middle of know where, without water or shelter, she knew the desert was unforgiving and relentless and that she would not last very long at all. Anyway her Aunts consoling words rang in her ears "keep your friends close but your enemies even closer" Before she knew it she was ushered towards the middle of the bus, where there was a table bulging with food, baskets of fruit and vegetables, hummus and tzatziki dips, corn crackers, organic honey jars, sugar free almond butter, and a sad looking plate of strange items labelled GFDF deserts. "Do help yourself daaaaaarling and don't be shy" said the she/he. "Oh how rude of me, I didn't introduce myself" and with a dramatic

bow, proclaimed “ My stage name is W short for Wicked but my real name is Jenny, Jenny Mac Craig”, “Oh and my name is, before she could get it out, Jenny said “Dot” with the faintest smirk on her lips. Before Dot could respond with a swish of her feathers Jenny was gone, heading back to the front of the bus, leaving only the smell of her cologne and heady sense of danger.

Dot put the squirming Toto down, who was more than ready to partake in the banquet. She looked around and saw 6 people in similar clothing as her gracious host, sitting there just staring into space like drones, as if Dot wasn't even there. Then to her utter astonishment, she saw at the back of the bus the Business man, the Bogan and Di the nail bitter. She never thought she would be so ecstatic too see a bunch of strangers in her life. They seemed pleased to see her too, except for the Business man who was indifferent. “Wow never thought I would see you guys again, thought you were dead,” exclaimed Dot excitedly. Yeah well we may as well be, stuck on this bus full of weirdos heading nowhere” said the Business man. “No were not” said the Bogan” I heard em say we were goin to the City of Light”. “Oh shut up you village idiot “growled the Business man “The City of Light, what where the fairies and gnomes are? Next you'll be telling us were going over the bloody flaming, fricking rainbow”

Dot felt a gentle tug on her arm and Di the nail bitter whispered “it's true, I heard them talking about it, meeting everyone there at a rendezvous point off the Leach highway. Hmmmm, City of Light, it had a ring to it “think Dot think”, “ use those brain cells Aunt Em keeps telling you, you have an abundance of”

Then, it came to her in a flood, of course! She had read about it in the papers, it was a big event Perth, with people coming for all over Oz. It was 60 years since the first spaceship had circumnavigated the earth and Perth city had honoured the event by lighting up the city. The astronaut on board had seen it and had named Perth the city of light, and consequently it had stuck with the capital. The Bogan loudly and proudly interrupted her thoughts. “Hey lady the bus driver told me to give ya this” It was a brown parcel, with her name scribbled on it, as if the writer was in a hurry. She tore it open and to her dismay there were 3 more pairs of Bludstones, a small, medium and large, and a note that read:

*Congratulations and Celebrations*

*Stay close to the witch beware she's a bitch, full of tricks*

*Follow the serpent; it is a lot closer than you think*

*P.S. Don't order the grilled chicken salad...under any circumstances!!!!*

Then it hit her like a ton of bricks, the pieces of the puzzle were finally falling into place. Giant letter M, flying chicken nuggets, Jenny Mac Craig. Of course, the celebrations were being held in the largest Mc Donald's store in Australia, which was in Melville a suburb of Perth. The witch and his entourage were heading there, evil was a foot, she could feel it in her bones. Then her eyes caught something through the back window of the bus in the distance, whatever it was, it was gaining speed rapidly and would soon be upon them. She squinted to make sure it was not another mirage. This was no mirage this was a multi-coloured bus convoy weaving it was through the highway to join them. My god it looked just like a huge snake....then cha Ching! It was just like a huge rainbow serpent, except she wasn't following it; she was going to be part of it and soon!!

*(Tina Pleschka)*

## Chapter 4

The convoy appeared to have a life of its own and as it got closer, Dot saw that the driver of the lead bus was a woman dressed in a glowing yellow gown, and wearing a gold witch's hat. Even from a distance she appeared to radiate positivity, the feeling grew stronger as her bus moved onto the grass verge and alongside the bus they were in. Jenny McCraig (W) and her 6 boguns became visibly agitated; Jenny went up to the window and started shouting and waving her fist at the vision in yellow and gold. The boguns emerged from their drone like state and joined her at the window shouting abuse. Unperturbed the other bus continued along the verge and began to draw ahead of them, with a burst of speed the bus came back on to the road and slewed sideways in front of them, blocking their progress. "If that sanctimonious, do-gooding bitch thinks she can interfere with me, she has another think coming", ranted Jenny. Dot and her companions were nervous; Dot had certainly sensed something evil was surrounding them, now the atmosphere was becoming confused; the air was full of craziness.

The driver of Jenny's bus slammed on the brakes and screamed to a halt. The vision in gold suddenly materialized in their bus without appearing to have walked from one bus to another; things were getting more and more peculiar. She stood beside the driver, smiling back towards the bewildered occupants of the bus. Toto leaped off Dot's lap, rushed up to "Miss Golden" and began to furiously hump her leg, a sure sign that the dog highly approved and was attracted to her. Feeling embarrassed Dot looked away, and in the corner of her eye saw two very unusual looking characters stepping up into the bus. One appeared to be made of straw and one of tin, although human like features were visible under their strange apparel.

The straw man and the tin man walked boldly up to Dot, encouraged by Miss Golden. "OK darling, let's have the brown paper bag", said the straw man. Despite her astonishment at hearing quite an ordinary voice coming out of an extraordinary body, Dot recalled the paper bag she had been handed, and wished she had bothered to look and see what was in it. She sensed that passing it on was important; and as she tentatively stretched her hand toward the straw man and gave up the paper bag, Miss Golden looked on approvingly. Straw Man opened the bag and out came the 3 pairs of Blundstone boots. He put on the medium pair, gave tin man the large pair and Dot the small pair. Dot was a little reluctant to swap her lovely red boots for the utilitarian looking Blundstones, however she realised something very powerful and compelling was going on so didn't argue. Amazingly all 3 pairs fitted the new owners as if made for them. Putting on the boots seemed to give Dot an electrical charge, she felt powerful,

pumped up and ready to take on anything. The straw man and the tin man were undergoing a similar transformation. Dot's prior companions, the business man, the bogun and Di the nail biter sat quietly and nervously observing the changes.

Jenny's drones slumped further and further into their seats, beginning to look quite defeated, whilst Jenny herself showed visible signs of failing, her body was sagging but she managed to keep up a stream of verbal attack. Dot strode over to her and gave her a good slap across the face, "take that you evil bitch, you witch, I was warned about you". Dot recalled that she had also been warned to stick close to the witch, to follow the serpent, to find the driver of their bus and not to order a chicken salad. Well, she thought I am doing OK; the evil witch is right here with me, the bus convoy resembles a rainbow serpent and there isn't a chicken salad in sight. All I need to do now is find the driver of my bus, "I hope he is still alive". No sooner than the thought crossed her mind, the straw man pushed the straw hanging over his eyes aside and winked at her. Dot recognised the bus driver, and beamed with relief; Toto had recognised him too and wagged his tail with great excitement.

People on the bus were automatically splitting into 2 groups. Dot, Tin Man and Straw Man were in the group gaining power and led by Miss Golden, now referred to as MG. The 6 drones were in the group led by Jenny, now referred to as W. All of them, including W appeared to be losing their energy and the ability to challenge. MG took charge of the situation, "right everyone off and onto my bus" she told them. W tried to protest but got a quick shove in the back by Dot, so she sheepishly called the drones and led them onto the rainbow serpent lead bus. MG followed them and ordered them to the back of the bus. Dot and her companions followed onto the bus and were allocated seats up front. MG started up and resumed the road, with the rest of the convoy following. "Come on everyone, let's sing the wheels on the bus go round and round, everyone must know that one". Dot hadn't sung this since kindy but was prepared to do whatever it took to stay on side. She joined in with a quiet little voice; other voices from around the bus joined in too, till suddenly the voices rose and harmonized, making quite something of the childish little ditty. As the song gained in beauty, the bus lifted into the air and sailed smoothly toward the distant hills, followed by the 5 other buses making up the convoy.

*(Pat Matthews)*

## Chapter 5

There was a shudder and a sudden drop that made Dot's stomach rise to her throat. When the bus began to spin, and the dizziness came, she held her head in her hands and screamed. 'Oh God, not again!' Then she fainted.

When Dot woke. She was in a bed, in a room and, by what she gathered from the lack of decor, in a hospital. At the foot of the bed, in a chair, sat a woman with a round face and greying hair. A woman she recognized.

'Aunt Emily,' she rasped.

The woman jumped to her feet. 'Oh Dot, sweetie, you're awake. We've been so worried. Let me get the doctor.' She flew out of the room before Dot was able to remove the oxygen mask from her face and ask the first of many questions.

Moments later the door burst open and her aunt re-appeared, followed by a white coated woman . . . or was it a man? Dot couldn't actually tell. The doctor was of a large build, with massive hands, huge feet and a broad face that had been heavily made up. The foundation looked as if it had been slapped on with a trowel, and the amount of eye make-up used would have sufficiently covered the eyes lids of the whole Kardashian family, including Caitlyn Jenner.

Dot's hand was pumped by the medical giant's fist. 'Dr. Jennifer Mac Craig. So-o-o glad you're back with us, da-a-rling,' came the booming, melodious voice.'

'What happen?' Dot cried, 'Where am I? How did I get here?'

While he . . . she, took her blood pressure, Dot was given the information she now craved.

'One, the bus you were travelling in was caught up in a stupendous dust storm. Two, you are in the Perth general hospital, and three, some friends of yours found you and brought you in.'

'Friends?' Dot frowned. 'I don't have any friends out this way.'

'Yes you do, sweetie,' said her aunt, taking her hand and stroking it. 'They've been waiting for days to see that you're okay. Uncle Harry and I put them up in our house

and I've been baking all sorts of things to keep their hunger at bay. For some reason they all have an aversion to grilled chicken . . . strange. Anyway, they're out there in the waiting room. Is Dot up for visitors?' she asked the doctor before heading out the door.

He . . . she . . . nodded. 'Certainly. This young lady seems to be as right as rain now.'

'Are you sure?' balked Dot, 'I've had some super crazy dreams. They seemed so real, yet . . . unreal. Like a cross between a Tim Burton movie and Baz Luhrman production.'

Dr Mac Craig leant over to pat Dot's cheek, revealing a feather boa tucked into her décolletage. 'You had quite a bump on the old noggin'. We thought you might have had a brain hemorrhage but no, just major concussion. You were very lucky your friends went searching for you. That little dog of theirs sniffed you out. Tim Tam . . . Blotto . . . or some such.'

'Toto.'

'Yes, that's it. Has a hankering for Jimmy Barnes, so I discovered.' She wagged a meaty finger in Dot's face. 'A warning: Don't sing *Working Class Man* unless you want that little mutt to do revolting things to your leg.'

Dot smiled, 'Sounds like Toto alright.'

There was a noisy commotion outside the room, and then an oddly familiar group of people fought each other into the room.

An indigenous man with a dog under his arm was first. 'Dot, girl, welcome back to the land of the living,' he grinned. Toto barked once and leapt from his arms to the bed, scampering over the sheets to lick her hand.

'Bleedin' heck, you look as healthy as a whore,' blinked a tattooed man in denim and flannelette, scratching his scruffy mullet and burping loudly.

'That's 'as healthy as a horse', you moron,' laughed a burly man in an open neck shirt and business pants, as he slapped the scrawny man on the back in a friendly manner.

A head poked around the side of the door. It was a woman's and it was sporting a smile that lit up her entire face. She stepped into the room and eyed Dot with a new, steady gaze. 'Is it true? Are you really alright?'

Dot nodded and returned the smile.

The woman clapped her hands, revealing a set of neatly manicured nails. 'That's lovely. We're thrilled.'

'We sure are,' chimed in the rest of the group, now forming at the foot of the bed with their arms linked.

Dot's mouth fell open. She couldn't believe how civil they were with each other.

'I know,' said the bus driver, giving a wink, 'They've changed. Who would've thought a search and rescue would bring this lot together. They've struck up a real friendship.'

'Thank you,' said Dot with tears pooling in her eyes, 'thank you, everyone.'

Dr Mac Craig gave a bow. 'Well, I'll leave you in the good hands of your friends.' With a dramatic wave of her arms, she danced from the room in a cloud of musk – a lone feather drifting in her wake.

Dot swung her legs over the side of the bed in readiness to rise from the mattress. Looking down, she spied a pair of Blundstones in her size. Red Blundstones.

'Our gift to you,' said the bus driver. 'They'll take you anywhere you want.'

'How about home,' sighed Dot, 'or at least to my Aunt and Uncle's. There's no place like it.'

'Too bloody right,' fist pumped the bogun.

'Woof!' barked Toto.

'Can we swing by a Maccas on the way?' asked Dot. 'I could really go for some chicken nuggets right now.'

The group eyed each other awkwardly, before breaking into laughter that may or may not have been forced.

*(Vicki Stevens)*