

'Up you go, Mrs. Glover. Over a little-and down-just a smidgin.'

Hands all over her, one on her bare bottom as hospital staff positioned Amy Glover comfortably on the physiotherapy table. Her left arm scrabbled to cover exposed parts while her right arm lay weak and useless.

A nurse lifted Amy's paralysed right leg into place, then covered her with a light blanket. 'There. You should be fine until Alistair arrives. He won't be long.'

So embarrassing, Amy thought. Everyone gawping at my scrawny bones and camelhump back.

Fellows used to wolf-whistle at her willowy body once. Especially her legs. Wolfwhistling was considered unacceptable nowadays, a form of harassment. Either way, she acknowledged to herself, men didn't like old ladies much, and she hadn't been fussed about blokes for ages. She tugged the skimpy gown closer.

The nurse placed a pillow under her head. 'Alistair's your physio,' she explained. 'He'll do assessment and get you going on an exercise programme. Won't be long.'

She closed her eyes and remembered the distance her legs had carried her. There'd been hours of practice with the Rosellas Marching Girls, culminating in winning the Nationals in Melbourne. In her mind she could see the red skirts flick cheekily as 12 young women marched perfectly. Precisely. Snappily. And the boots -long and snow white, almost up to the knee, marching, marching, marching in time to rousing music. So real it seemed she could hear it.

Her legs had carried her up hills and mountains, round and round sports arenas, through schoolrooms and schoolyards teaching and supervising children. They had marched her up the aisle at Wesley Cathedral to marry Neville, clinging to her father's arm.

'Wake up, Mrs. Glover.' Amy's eyes opened reluctantly. 'I'm Alistair and I'm here to assess your condition.'

Amy stared up at the most beautiful young fellow she had seen in years and shivered as long forgotten hormones flushed her wrinkled face. She cursed her lousy luck. Not only am I old, she thought, I've had a stroke, I'm no use to anyone and I might as well be dead. Depression settled around her, a familiar black cloud since the day she'd been hospitalised. Warm tears drizzled from the corners of her eyes and pooled in her ears.

Daughter Natalie had lectured her yesterday about her tears. 'Mother, you have to quit this endless crying. You're going to be fine. Before long you'll be up and about and having fun again. Think positive.' Amy was tired of hearing the same platitudes and

wished there were someone she could have a decent conversation with; someone who didn't keep giving her advice.

Alistair's voice broke in. 'We'll make exercising fun,' he said. 'Just try to do what I ask. Back in a second.' He strode away, whistling softly. The tune stirred something in Amy's memory, but she couldn't think why.

Her mind seemed to be playing tricks since that Monday afternoon when her arm began to tingle and her words slurred together. She wondered if the stroke had affected her memory.

Neville had tried to lift his wife's spirits. 'They all missed you at the weekend rally,' he told her during a visit. 'Especially the girls. They reckon there's no-one keeps the blokes in line the way you do. No-one to play tricks on them the way you do.'

Amy had rolled her eyes and snorted. She was President of the Gadderbouts Caravan Club, an efficient office-bearer who knew what she was doing and produced ideas for weekend rallies that kept everybody enthusiastic and co-operative. The members were a load of laughs. She loved the cut and thrust of verbal jousting between the men and women, loved the tricks and pranks played out, all in the name of fun. It was stimulating to be among like-minded people who didn't take life too seriously any more.

However, in the blink of an eye, events had taken a downward spiral and she feared life as she knew it was over. She was in a miserable condition and had dragged her family and friends down with her.

Alistair was back. 'I'm going to play with your legs for a while, if that's all right,' he said and thrust her good leg straight up in the air. 'That doesn't hurt, does it?'

She noticed he had a wedding ring on his finger. It looked new. Now she remembered what he'd been whistling. Of course. She'd walked down the aisle to that same tune on her wedding day.

It's time to play tricks, she decided. Time to have fun with this nice young man.

She looked solemnly up at him. 'You have an aura,' she said.

'Hmmm. Your speech sounds pretty good. Now let's see if we can bend this knee.' Alistair lifted the bad leg and began testing for flexibility.

'It has many colours. Pink, mauve, golden yellow. All the colours of love.'

'Yes. Well. Let's have a look at this hand.' He picked up her limp arm and rotated the thumb. 'See if you can do that yourself'

Amy closed her eyes and lowered her voice. 'There's a church. A grand cathedral.' Carefully, she tried to rotate her thumb.

'How about these fingers?' He wriggled each one in turn.

'You seem to be at a wedding.' Amy struggled to move her fingers. ' You look handsome in your special outfit. It seems to be a black suit, white shirt and black bow tie. '

Alistair put her arm down slowly and stared at her. Well, she had his attention. 'There's a white cloud floating near the church. It's surrounded by several coloured clouds. Happy laughing clouds. '

Alistair became impatient. 'Never mind the sky. Tell me what else you see. About me, I mean.'

How we love to hear about ourselves, Amy thought. He's walked right into my fun time.

'I see lots of people around you. All the people who love you. All your friends and family. Lots of people wearing lovely clothes. They're all around you.'

His voice was puzzled. 'How do you know anything about me? You've never met me until today.'

'There are flowers.' She sniffed the air. 'Perfume. It smells like roses. I see tall vases of roses, and bunches of roses in the clouds. The biggest white cloud is surrounded by several coloured clouds. They're all girl clouds and they have beautiful young faces. The coloured clouds have turned into lovely ladies in colourful dresses. The white cloud has turned into a beautiful bride wearing a long white gown. She's smiling at you, almost as though she's in love with you. And there's confetti all over the place. An organ is playing.' Amy sighed deeply then went quiet.

He touched her shoulder. 'Don't go to sleep yet. I want to hear what else you've got to say.'

Amy was silent, eyes closed.

Alistair looked down at her. 'I don't know how you know,' he said 'but I just got married. Two weeks ago, in the cathedral.' Two black eyebrows sailed high on his

forehead. 'And you can see all that in my aura?'

Amy lay still, feigning exhaustion. The door opened and Neville and Natalie were ushered in by a nurse.

Alistair turned to them. 'Mrs. Glover is an amazing woman,' he said. 'We've never met before today, but she knows all about me. She knows all about my wedding in the cathedral, the roses, what I wore, what the bride and bridesmaids wore.' He paused to draw breath. 'She's amazing. '

Neville looked across at his recumbent wife. 'Yes,' he said. 'I know that.'

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