

## Chapter 1

# Bail Up!



“Yah! Yah!” the coachman yelled at the horses, lashing his whip in the air. The passengers rattled about like dried peas in a tin as the wheels of the Cobb & Co coach flew over the rough and stony track.

“Faster, coachman, faster!” one of the men called out, leaning his head out of the window. “Look, they’re gaining on us!” But it was no use. The lumbering coach was no match for the bushrangers’ swift horses. Emma could hear hoof beats and wild cries of “Bail up!” coming closer. The people in the coach began to quake with fear and one of the women screamed.

Suddenly, the coach lurched to a stop, and a red-bearded face appeared at the coach window. “Empty your pockets, you snivelling scaredy cats,” the bushranger said, “or I’ll blow your hats off . . . er, I mean . . . I’ll blow my brains out . . . um . . . well, you get the idea! Hand over your valuables. I’m Mad Malachy Macraw, the boss of this gang, and I don’t muck around!”

“Yeah,” the other robbers shouted, “that’s the way. You tell them, Mal!”

“Mad Mal, the bushranger!” one of the passengers whispered. “We’d better do as he says.”

They all started anxiously rummaging in their bags for purses, wallets or jewellery to give him.

“That’s more like it,” Mad Mal said, with a leer. “Hurry up and hand it over.”

Emma didn’t have even a penny in her pocket, let alone a purse to hand over. She just sat glaring angrily at the bushranger.

Mad Mal glared back. “Look,” he said, “I’ve got a weapon here and I’m ready to use it.” He took something out of his belt and waved it in her face.

Emma looked at it. “That’s a carrot!” she said.

Mal's face turned crimson. He stared at the carrot in bewilderment. "A carrot?" he said. Then he brightened. "This may look like a carrot," he said bravely, "but it's not. It's really a deadly weapon—and it's loaded."

"Yeah, right," said Emma.



The other passengers were shakily taking off rings and necklaces and handing over bags of gold. They were too nervous to notice anything odd.