

## Strange Doin's – Draft 2

“Hey no sitting down on the job,” said Judy Walsh, my best friend of twenty-years, who’s generously given up her Saturday to help me pack for my next Big Move. I’ve been offered the opportunity of a lifetime – again. Except this time it’s different.

“I’ve, er, changed my mind,” I tell her.

She sits next to me on the top step. “Really? That’s not like you. You love moving.”

“I must,” I tell her, “In the last eight years I’ve moved house five times, cities four times and states three times. I think maybe it’s time to stay in one place.”

She looks at me curiously. “So what’s really going on?”

I sigh. I’ve known Judy since I was five years old. She knows me better than anyone else and she’s always accepted my nuttiness.

“This,” I tell her, holding up what looks like a rather mangy ball of tangle wool.

“What the hell is that thing?”

“It’s a pom pom,” I tell her. She stares at me in disbelief. “Well,” I concede, “I suppose it does look like something the cat dragged in.”

“More like something the cat vomited,” she says uncharitably.

“It arrived last week,” I tell her, “in this box.” I show her the weather-beaten package. It bears US stamps from a decade earlier. Address labels crowd every remaining inch – clearly the pom pom has trailed my nomadic life and finally found me.

“It’s from your exchange year in the US, right?” she asks. I nod. “Okay, now I’m intrigued. How does a mangy pom pom find you after ten years?”

“Strange doin’s,” I tell her solemnly.

She raises a skeptical eyebrow.

“It’s how my host father used to explain the unexplainable.”

Joe Barton was an avid conspiracy theorist. He had detailed, if not entirely plausible theories about everything from the moon landing and what actually happened on that Grassy Knoll in 1963 to the Super Bowl and John Lennon. Whenever we’d say the most innocent of things, he’d shake his head and say, “Strange doin’s. Strange, strange doin’s.” And this burly Californian made a lasting impression on a shy fifteen year old from Hervey Bay, a seaside holiday spot on Australia’s Queensland coast.

Surely the pom-pom’s arrival is indeed the strangest of doin’s. It was once attached to a beanie that Joe gave me as a memento of my first ever ski trip. I’d gone onto the slopes bursting with enthusiasm and returned with a pom-pom-less beanie – and more than a couple of aches and pains. It reminded me of Joe and his quirky brand of wisdom.

“Joe used to say, The squirrel that moves from tree to tree forgets where he’s stored his nuts.”

I was all set to accept a job interstate when it arrived, obviously tired and distressed from its ten year journey. Joe made this pom pom for me. Melody and I were knitting beanies and his contribution to our fireside chats was to make pom poms for our projects. I thought I'd lost it in the snow – clearly I'd lost it somewhere. When we'd left the house, the pom pom was clearly attached to my beanie. Yet when Melody and I returned from throwing snowballs and making snow angels, it was gone. Now it was here. And I felt its arrival brought with it more than a message of friendship.

Travelling to American as a naïve teenagers had opened my eyes to the possibilities. I wanted to travel. I wanted to see the world. Now, at twenty-six I was still a nomad. Every year, it seemed brought me to a new town. I thought I'd meet my soulmate as I skipped around; yet he hadn't appeared. In fact, stable relationships were fraught with a commitment that meant staying in one place – something I seemed incapable of doing.

I had been offered a job in Perth, a six hour flight from my now home town of Melbourne. I was all set to accept, when the pom pom arrived and reminded me of Joe's words: "The squirrel who flits from tree to tree, forgets where he's stored his nuts."

"Wow! That sounds like authentic native American wisdom," says Judy.

I smile. "Irish Catholic, actually – probably with a bit too much altar wine."

"And so this means, you're not taking the job in Perth?" she asks. "of squirrels losing their nuts?"

"Don't you see? It's all linked. It must be."

"Must it?"

"Yes," I say firmly. "It's one of Joe's Strange doin's. He used to say everything happens for a reason. Why else would this pom pom arrive right now, when I'm deciding another move?"

"Because a postman ten years ago got a flat bicycle tire and didn't deliver it?"

I frown at her. "Seriously Judy." She looks at me blankly. "Okay don't believe, me.

But the end result is, I'm not taking the job. I'm staying here. End of story."

"Well, you'll have no complaints from me there. I'm more than happy to have my best friend around."

"Still," I muse, "I'd like to know why I'm meant to stay."

"Maybe you never will," she says.

"Excuse me," says a male voice. I look up, startled. There standing on my doorstep must surely be the most gorgeous man I've ever seen. He holds out a cup and says apologetically, "I'm sorry, this is going to sound so corny, but I've just moved in next door and, well, I could really use some sugar. Could you spare a cup?"

My heart skips a beat as our eyes connect and my soul greets its mate.

"Sure," I say. "Come on in. I'm not going anywhere."