

Strange Doin's – Draft 3

“Looks like moving house is in the air,” says Judy my best friend pointing at the moving van that’s parked in my neighbor’s driveway.

“Apparently so,” I say. “At least for some.”

“For some?” she asks, sitting on the front step next to me.

“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. “But this is the opportunity of a lifetime,” she says. “So what’s really going on?”

I sigh. Judy has known me since, at the age of four, we played ‘make up’ with permanent markers. I can tell her anything.

“This,” I tell her, holding up what looks like a rather mangy ball of tangle wool. I was all set to accept a job interstate when it arrived, obviously tired and distressed from its ten year journey.

“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 to the Super Bowl. And this burly Californian with his catchcry of ““Strange doin’s. Strange, strange doin’s.” made a lasting impression on a shy fifteen year old from Hervey Bay, a seaside holiday spot on Australia’s Queensland coast.

Joe gave me the pom-pom, though at the time it was attached to a beanie. That Christmas, I’d gone out on the ski slopes with the pom-pom intact and come back to the Lodge without it. That makes its arrival after ten years, the strangest of doin’s.

“Joe used to say, *The squirrel that moves 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 after a bit too much altar wine.”
“So you’re not taking the job because of a squirrel and his nuts?”
“Don’t you see?” I explain, “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. “This pom-pom got me thinking. I want a relationship. I want to find someone who makes my soul sing. I haven’t had a decent relationship in years. And maybe that’s because I keep moving. This pom-pom is an omen. For whatever reason, this time, I’m meant to stay.”
“Well, you’ll have no complaints from me there. I’m more than happy to have my best friend around.”

“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.”
I wink at Judy and whisper, “Joe also said, *Sometimes the squirrel finds the best nuts at the base of his own tree.*”