

Strange Doin's – Draft 4

“It's an omen.” I tell my best friend Judy. She stares at the rather mangy ball of tangled wool and then at me.

“Well,” I concede, “I suppose it does look like something the cat dragged in.”

“More like something the cat threw up,” she says uncharitably, then adds, “What is it anyway?”

“Believe it or not, it's the pom-pom from the beanie that Joe got me. I thought I'd lost it skiing at Tahoe.”

“Joe? Your host father from your year in California? But that must have been ten years ago. ”

It is. Ten years ago, aged fifteen I left my small hometown in rural Australia to spend an exchange year in Sacramento, California with the Bartons, Joe, Sarah and their daughter Milly. Joe was an avid conspiracy theorist describing anything that was mildly unusual as a *strange doin'*.

The arrival of my lost pom-pom was certainly the strangest of doin's. Yet it was timely. I'd been on the cusp of accepting yet another relocation; my eighth in as many years when the postman handed me the weather-beaten box. It bore US stamps from a decade earlier and a crowd of address labels that chronicled my nomadic life.

“You know, 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.” I juggle the prodigal pom-pom. “Still it made me think. I don't want to be single forever. I want to find my soul mate. I want to get married and have a mortgage. And I'm simply not going to do that moving from place to place.”

“You could find another nomad?” Judy suggests.

I shake my head. “Obviously not.”

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 arrived last week,” I tell her, “in this box.” I show her the weather-beaten package.

“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.”

“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.*”

716