

## Strange Doin's – Draft 5

“It's an omen.”

Judy 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,” Judy 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 Lake Tahoe.”

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

It is. A decade ago, at only fifteen I left my small hometown in rural Australia to spend an exchange year in Sacramento, California. The Bartons, Joe, Sarah and their daughter Milly were my host family. Though Milly and I remain in contact, my strongest memories were of Joe. He taught Milly and I how to develop black and white photos. He helped us build a soapbox derby. He took us to the beach at Santa Cruz and made plaster of Paris handprints in the sand. The thing I remember most, though, was description of anything mildly unusual as a *strange doin'*.

He would have loved the strangest of doin's – the sudden arrival of my lost pom-pom. Yet its arrival is timely. I've been on the cusp of accepting yet another relocation; my eighth in as many years. Last week, when the postman handed me the weather-beaten box with US stamps from a decade earlier and no return address, I rethought my plans. The box was crowded with address labels that chronicled my nomadic life. Travel was supposed to mean adventure. Instead, it meant never really connecting with anywhere – or anyone. I wanted to connect, to find that special someone who made my heart sing; someone to go to football games, share secrets with and plan a future that included a mortgage, a cat and perhaps a dog, shared holidays and maybe, one day, even children.

“You know,” I tell Judy, “Joe used to say, *Squirrel that move from tree to tree forget where nuts are stored.*”

“Wow! That sounds like authentic native American wisdom,” says Judy, clearly impressed.

I smile. “Irish Catholic, actually – probably after a bit too much altar wine.”

I juggle the prodigal pom-pom. “I know it sounds weird but this strange doin’ has made me think. I’m turning down the job. I’m going to stay here in Melbourne.”

Judy reaches to hug me. “No complaints here,” she says.

“I have to remember where I’ve buried my nuts,” I tell her seriously.

A knock at the door startles us. I’m not expecting anyone. I open the door. My eyes connect with two azure pools. A score of butterflies flit through my stomach as my soul greets its mate.

“This is going to sound so corny,” says the most gorgeous man I’ve ever seen, “I’m Steve from 3A. I’m baking a cake and I forgot to get some sugar. I was wondering if I could borrow a cup.”

“Sure,” I say. “Come on in. Judy, this is Steve from 3A. We’re just getting some sugar,” I tell her ushering Steve into the kitchen.

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

546