

Strange Doin's – Final Copy

"It's an omen."

Judy stares at the mangy ball of tangled wool and then at me.

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

Judy raises an uncharitable eyebrow and asks, "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 was 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. Joe was an amazing father. He taught Milly and me how to develop black and white photos in a light-proofed cupboard off his kitchen. He took us to baseball games and showed us how to make plaster-of-Paris handprints in Santa Cruz 's white sands. The things I remember most though, were Joe's deep wisdom and his description of anything mildly unusual as a *strange doin'*. Surely the sudden arrival of my lost pom-pom is the strangest of all *doin's*.

The timing is eerie. I've been on the cusp of accepting yet another relocation; my eighth in as many years. 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 chronicling a nomadic life that was supposed to be adventurous. Instead, it meant never really connecting with anywhere - or anyone. Now I want to connect. To find that special someone who makes my heart sing; someone to plan a future with; maybe share a house, buy a dog, settle down.

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

"Is that Native American wisdom?" Judy asks, clearly impressed.

I smile. "Irish Catholic, actually - 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 transfer. I'm going to stay here in Melbourne; see if I can't find some of those nuts."

Judy hugs me. "No complaints here," she says.

A knock at the door startles us. I'm not expecting anyone. I open the door.

"I'm Steve from 3A," says the most gorgeous man I've ever seen. My eyes connect with his azure pools. A score of butterflies flit through my stomach as my soul greets its mate.

He smiles and says, "I'm baking a cake and I forgot to get sugar. Could I borrow some?"

"Sure," I say. "Come on in." I usher him into my apartment. "Judy, this is Steve from 3A. He's just borrowing some sugar."

As I pass Judy on the way to the kitchen, I wink and whisper, "Joe also said, *Sometimes squirrel find best nuts at base of own tree.*"

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