

HOW ABOUT?

with Louise Howland

A chance meeting with a stranger gives Louise some perspective, propelling her day in another direction entirely.



The morning had not started as well as I thought it might. We had been out late on a weeknight and neglected our usual preparations for the next day. Rising some half-an-hour later than usual, I wasted more time in the black hole of wondering what to wear. My dearest old cat decided he only felt well enough to eat his breakfast from the palm of my hand. Rina dropped the wire that holds the guinea pigs' water to their cage and we couldn't find it among the long grass, so we had to locate something else from which they could drink. The day was going to be a hot one so I watered the plants, not with the pleasure this normally gives me, but with a 'here's one more thing I have to do before I even leave the house' attitude. I mentally cursed my husband for being away working oh, how honestly I speak to you my friends.

The ute was low on petrol so a drum needed to be filled in case we ran out. Work was twisting and furling around my mind and, feeling quite stressed, I considered the pros and cons of various trade shows while attempting mental arithmetic until the petrol overflowed. Rina asked for a hairstyle far more complex than her usual ponytail – why do they do this on mornings where time is of the essence? You know the drill; you've had these mornings and then some. Mentally continuing the 'why don't I ever get

a break?' theme, it was with some relief I finally settled at my desk, a place where I'm normally inordinately happy.

Ten minutes in and the door buzzer went. Groaning came easily on this morning, as you already know. Emerging I saw a nice-looking lady, probably a decade younger than I, entering our showroom carrying four kits.

"I decided that I would give these back to you," she spoke quietly. "I can only do one of them."

Concerned, I asked why that was. Were the instructions unclear? Would she like to exchange them for different designs? Were they a gift she didn't want?

"On no," she responded. "It's nothing like that. I have just been told that I have only a month to live. So I'll keep the gold angel, stitch it and include all my daughters' initials."

We stared at each other, both tearful. I invited her to come in for a cup of tea. Over two hours she told me about her life, her family, her home, the stitching she had done and her recent passion for decorating clothes. "The sicker I became, the more bright and sparkling I wanted my embroidery to look. It's funny," she explained,



"combinations I would have thought garish a year ago now please me so very much. I also have to give things away as soon as they're finished."

She looked at my desk photos of my daughter in her beloved and bejewelled Indian clothes and said, "I would like your daughter to have some of my decorated shirts. May I come back next week?"

"Yes, please do. We'd love that," I replied. We hugged, we smiled, and she was gone.

Until next month,

Louise