

Currying Fortune

“Help others in need and you will be rewarded.” It had been a vague prophecy once tucked within the crisp cocoon of a fortune cookie. Though such cookies were common place and doled out in Asian restaurants the world over, the waitress discovered an unexpected wisdom hidden within the gimmick. As she cleared the half-eaten platters of food and set down the check, she placed a small basket of fortune cookies on the table.

“Laughter is the shortest distance between two people.” The teenage girl crunched up the small piece of paper in her hand. She grunted to herself, considering the poor translation on the reverse side of the fortune. She didn’t believe in the suggestion. She thought about handing the slip to her younger brother who had started a collection the last time they were at the restaurant, but then she remembered their battle of a month ago. It had made their relationship sink, forcing each of them to abandon ship, clutching debris as they drifted in opposite directions. An uncomfortable distance had formed between them. She recalled more carefree days of watching movies while buried beneath blankets and snaking up trees with her brother. She wondered whether he would forgive her for her cruel words.

Sighing, she looked down at the crumbled paper in her hands and speculated whether it bore some truth after all. Noticing that her brother already had three fortunes gathered in front of him, she offered her paper, “So do you want to make a *four-tune* out of that three-tune?”

It was a witty remark worthy of her father’s “G-rated” jokes. Fortuitously, her brother’s wild, roaring laughter rang out unabated. The girl’s giggles chimed in like silver bells. As they exchanged more puns and jokes, the chorus of laughter rescued the would-be castaways.

“Time is precious in life. Live well by organizing your time.” The boy congratulated himself. He had successfully pulled the pearl of wisdom from the clam-shaped cookie without resorting to cracking its shell. He observed his family members casting aside their yellow shells and slips of paper. He reeled them in with care. The boy thought about asking his sister for her piece of crumbled up paper, but then he recalled his promise not to talk to her “ever again.”

He had lost when playing a board game with her. After hours of struggling for imaginary property and coveting the pretend money, he had burst into tears over his fruitless efforts for victory. His sister had been annoyed that he was crying over a simple board game. When the crying didn’t cease, she couldn’t restrain her anger.

“You know, this is why no one wants to be your friend. Who wants to be around a crybaby like you!” she yelled.

After that he had ran out of the room, regretting that he wasn't like the other boys in his class. The boy felt himself drowning in a pit of self-loathing, a feeling that manifested itself like a cannonball in his stomach.

Despite his refusal to speak with her, the boy deeply yearned for more time with his sister. She was his best friend. As he sifted through his treasure of fortunes, his eyes fixated on one which said that time was valuable. He had limited time with his sister: before she grew older and didn't want to play games with him anymore; before she went out into the world and entered into adulthood. As he considered seizing the moment and using the time left with his sister to its fullest, she broke the silence with a terrible joke. His laugh was only partly exaggerated.

“Try to understand your partner.” While the sickeningly sweet cookie dissolved in his mouth, the tall, barrel-chested man read the piece of paper. Without giving the advice a second thought, he passed the paper on to his son. As he waited for the waitress to return with his credit card, his fingers fluttered repeatedly at the edge of the table. The restaurant was the last place he wanted to be. He was of the opinion that preparing for his upcoming business trip would have been a better investment than an entire afternoon at an overpriced establishment. His wife had insisted that they have a meal as a family before his trip.

Despite his initial resistance to the outing, reality began to permeate. During his frequent absences, he had not noticed the space that had formed between his children who were usually inseparable. He had not noticed how tired and sickly his wife had become after the arrival of the newest addition to the family. When he held the baby, his youngest child would scream until he returned the baby to the mother's gentle embrace. The youngest child did not seem to recognize him. As he looked around the table, warm understanding began to envelop and permeate his heart. He pulled out his phone, cancelling the business trip.

“An evening red and a morning gray will bring prettiest blue into the day.” The woman smiled wearily as she cradled the baby in her arms. As she looked out the window with heavy lids and blurry eyes, she was met with bright cerulean skies and a comforting golden sun. Last night's report had predicted heavy rainfall.

Perhaps with such nice weather, they could all go for a walk in the park as soon as the bill was settled. The woman questioned her own suggestion as soon as she conjured it. Her family had reluctantly come to the restaurant.

When she witnessed her son and daughter laughing and talking with one another for the first time in a month, the hopeful proposal tumbled out of her mouth. To her surprise, her suggestion was met with a resounding “yes” from everyone at the table.

“Today you are making the best suggestions.” As she set the credit card and receipt down on the table, the waitress recalled a fortune she encountered earlier that day. The family members, who had all silently entered the restaurant and picked at their food for a small eternity, had all excitedly exited discussing which park to visit. The waitress beamed and grabbed the basket of fortune cookies. She delivered it to another unhappy table.

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