

## The Fortune Cookie

Inspiration came to me in a cookie the size of an acorn. Sometimes I question how such a big idea came from such a small meaningless thing, but I think that's how all ideas are formed. When I opened up my dessert, I wasn't expecting to find anything important on the small slice of paper. I assumed it'd read the same thing as the person's next to me. I don't know why this message set itself away from the other ones. I don't what made me actually believe that this fortune had anything to do with my life. Why should I take some advice from an old man sitting behind a computer typing up slogans he read off of google? It still seems to me a very good question.

I've recently been struggling with an eating disorder. My therapist said it was a side effect or in direct relation to my recent diagnosis of clinical depression. I don't agree so much. I never really agree with my therapist. She tells me things I already know but phrases them in larger words with more syllables and expects my parents to honk over 300 bucks. I could have told myself that I'm depressed 3 years ago for zero dollars, but my mom never believed me. I suppose she needed someone with a degree to say it for it to actually mean something to her. Anyways, I refuse to eat. I hate the feeling I get after indulging in a multi-thousand calorie meal. No matter how good the food is, the only taste I digest is complete disgust with myself. My mother threatened to ground me if I didn't knock off my "impeccable behavior". She said I needed to stop begging for so much attention and that maybe if I swallowed my pride then I could swallow some god damn food. It frustrates me how upset she gets now that I have a problem with my body. She never seemed to mind throwing in those punch lines about how I should lay off the sweets or ask me when soccer conditioning starts up again. Parents are probably the most contradicting, hypocritical and insincere human beings alive. I'll put my money on that. So one day after 2 hours of a therapist spitting already known facts and misconstrued interpretations on my behavior in my ear, my mom took me out to lunch. She thought that if she tempted me with a food I use to love, I would magically overcome my condition I'd been fighting for months now. My mom couldn't, or maybe by choice wouldn't, wrap the idea around her mind that I am a completely different person then I was a few years

ago. People change, they leave and more importantly they let us down. I seemed to figure out that before most people, but I don't know if I'll ever get around to accepting it. So she ordered me a full meal of General Zhou's chicken with rice and an egg roll. When the food came to me it was tempting to say at the least, but just smelling it and smiling at the thought of eating it was enough; I just became full. My theory is that I fill myself with the thoughts, I fill myself with self-disgust, I fill myself with guilt, I fill myself with so much hatred towards me that I don't have room for so much food. Next week at therapy I'll pay to my therapist another 300 dollars to agree with the idea. I managed to force down 5 pieces of chicken, 3 spoon fills of rice and 2 bites of the egg roll. My mom seemed satisfied enough. Once she was finished with her meal and smiling she went up to pay. While paying for dinner the fragile Chinese women seemed to be especially fascinated with me. Even when my mom offered her the money and a tip she kept her eyes fixed on me. Her intense stare made me feel uncomfortable so I shifted my weight a few times between my feet. After finally accepting the money; the women reached into a jar and pulled out two fortune cookies. My mom reached for one but the women retracted her hand quicker than I imagined possible. Instead she handed my mom the other one with a frown. She grabbed my arm and opened my hand then gently gave me the cookie. She whispered something so quiet, I could barely hear, "It's only 32 calories, but I don't think you'll regret a single one." I smiled uneasy and followed my mom out to the car. I was very curious about the cookie and what it'd read between its tan sugary halves. I was too repulsed with myself to eat it tonight so I set it inside my coat pocket.

The next day, I walked to school the regular way at the regular time. I think that routine is one of the most upsetting things to me. The thought of repeating the same thing for 20 years of my life honestly sickens me. You wake up earlier than you ever want to, you eat more than you desire to, you attend school to learn stuff you'll soon forget, and then you go home to start it all over again. It's not that I don't love the people in my life, because I do. It's not that I'm unhappy with life or I don't want to be alive anymore, it's just that I'm unhappy with MY life. I don't like the life I'm living or the way I live it. So anyways, my day at school was nothing special and nothing to talk about with my mom at the dinner table. I went up to my room, turned on my Christmas lights, listened to the Arctic Monkeys, and cuddled up with *Perks of Being a Wallflower*. Although daily routine and repetition bores and depresses me in ways nothing else does, I find comfort in it. It's comfortable to know that you're coming home to the same room

with the same mom who you're going to have the same conversation with. This is the way I've lived for the past 15 years, anything else is too abstract and frightening, although inviting. While taking off my jacket, the fortune cookie fell out of my pocket and dropped on the ground. Excited by the little surprise I had quickly forgotten about; I picked it up. My stomach rumbled as soon as it came within 3 feet of the smell. I hadn't eaten since 6 last night so I decided 32 calories wouldn't be too devastating to forfeit in the battle of my body. I peeled the wrapper off and cracked the cookie into 2 equal triangles. One side of the cookie held a small piece of paper I'd been expecting. I pulled the fortune out and predicted it'd say something like "Good things come to those who wait" but if I wanted to hear that I would pay a stranger 300 bucks. So instead I'd pay a different stranger 8 dollars to give my problems a shot. I then read 16 words, 21 syllables, a single sentence that changed my life, "Adventure and passion is not found in the ones around you, instead find it in yourself." I read the paper then read it again. The simple sentence knocked my whole mindset out of place. My brain had never thought of my life in such a light. Whenever I think of the unhappiness I feel in my life, I blame it on the people and circumstances around me. To think that I got myself here is so absurd, so unbelievable but somehow so logical. Of course those were not my first thoughts, when I opened that cookie. I thought the message was stupid, it was nothing but a cliché idea some foreign person formed upon some other unknown person. The man or women that wrote this knew nothing about me. The man or women knew none of the hardships and problems I faced; they didn't even know if I would walk into their restaurant and buy their food on that specific day. This same piece of advice could have gone to the happiest person alive, or the innocent child in front of me. They had no idea of who I was but they still wrote those meaningful words of advice like they knew me my whole life. On the other hand I did not know them one bit either. I did not know their credibility or even their first name so why did any of this matter? Why should I spend one more minute wondering if this life suggestion has any relevance to me? There is no way to describe my fascination with these stranger's words. Once remembering that the back side had a list of lucky numbers, I immediately flipped over the piece of paper. The list read as followed: 32,9,2,53, 96. I wouldn't have put too much thought into the numbers because I doubted their importance to me but the first number that caught my eye was one that surprised me. When the lady handed me this same cookie last night she said that the cookie held 32 calories, little did I know my luck would lie in the same number. It was too much of a coincidence to blame this whole incident on chance. Why couldn't my mom take this cookie? Why couldn't I have gotten any of the other cookies in that jar? Why this one? Why this fortune? My mind was spinning in spirals and my anxiety was taking complete control and these simple questions were consuming my brain. I ran down stairs to check my mom's fortune because

just maybe this fortune had not found me by choice and it was all a big coincidence after all. Perhaps my mom and every other customer that ate at Wings Garden that day all got the same, exact, meaningless fortune. I searched through the garbage and found my mom's crumpled up paper beneath my weeks' worth of lunches my mom insists on packing for me. Obviously her fortune had little to no meaning to her due to the placement of it. I uncoiled the paper and it said "It could be better, but it's good enough". I don't know why mom took so much hatred to the writing. I thought it was beautiful. That fortune had relevance to my life, so why didn't the Chinese women let me have this one? All of this made little sense to me. One thing I did take from it all was that, that fortune wanted to be read by me, specifically me, and there is something significant in that. So instead of tossing my piece of paper in the trash, I neatly folded it back up and tucked it in my coat pocket.

When I turned the lights off to go to bed later that night, I couldn't seem to turn my thoughts off. I turned and sighed in my sleep desperately trying to forget what I had read. I wanted to uncover the meaning of it all, I wanted to discover the truth of the recommendation, I wanted to figure out what every single one of those lucky numbers stood for and I wanted to do it all right now. The thought of the 3 tests I had to take tomorrow scared me enough to silence the thoughts and give my brain a little rest, but in the morning I know they'd be back again.

The morning after, I found myself waking up with a new found feeling. A type of feeling that was unfamiliar but comforting in some odd sense. It was like seeing an actress in a movie and swearing you've seen her in something else, but you can't seem to remember what that something else is. That's how I felt today, I knew that I had once felt this same way and thought these same things but I couldn't remember when and I couldn't remember what they called it. I wasn't complaining though, I liked this feeling. So I got up and I got dressed up and I walked to school the same was as yesterday and the day before, but today it wasn't as boring. Today when I walked up the boulevard, I started seeing things I'd never looked at before. There was an old juke box crammed on the side of someone's garage and there was a sidewalk family portrait some kid must've drew a few days ago. I was still bored that I was walking the same steps to the same place but I felt like I was walking in a new way.

When walking home from school I decided to take the long way home. Maybe I wanted a change in scenery or maybe I wanted something new to happen. Either way I wanted a change in my life. Maybe switching up the way I walk home from school and expecting miraculous change was a little optimistic, but I'd take the label if it gave me something to look forward to. While walking

through the park, I decided to take a break and swing a little. I love swinging, and I don't think just because I'm older swings should be any less available. I think I need the free time just as much as the little kid next to me. There's something about the mistaken action of flying that calms me. Swinging leads you to believe that you can fly or somehow outrun your problems...at least for me it does. While swinging my troubles away I forgot to notice the rest of the world, or more specifically the guy who had been swinging next to me for what seemed like quite a while. He looked pretty lost in thought as well. So I let us both conclude our personal reflections before turning to him and saying hi.

"You looked pretty out of it for a while" he responded.

"You're one to talk, what's eating you Tarzan?" I replied.

"Myself. What are you thinking about in that pretty little mind of yours?"

"Myself."

He smiled at me for a long time before hopping off the swing. He gathered his backpack and unplugged his music.

"What are you listening to?" I asked.

"The Smiths of course"

"There's no way I just found a boy that hasn't been brainwashed by rap radio..."

"It must be your lucky day" he grinned,

"Something like that" I smiled.

If I had the choice I would've stared into his sapphire blue eyes till the sky grew so dark I couldn't see them anymore. I would've ran my fingers through his sandy hair and I wouldn't need to take any breaks. I wouldn't ever need to stop because I don't think I'd ever want to, but regardless of my unrealistic wishes; I knew it was time to walk the rest of my way home.

"How come I've never seen you before" He asked,

"I don't know, you probably weren't looking too hard. I should go though it's getting dark."

“Yeah, me too. Hopefully I’ll see you again though. I’ll be looking extra hard this time.” He smirked, “Good. I’ll be looking forward to it, Tarzan boy.” I yelled back at the blue swing set.

Despite my best efforts, I couldn’t manage to wipe the smile that stranger gave me off my face. When I finally got home, my mom decided to play 20 questions with me. I told her I took the long way home for a change of scenery, but because I’m a teenager that automatically translates into “Yeah my mom I’m an hour late because I decided to drop acid, get drunk, throw a few parties and start my own prostitution business”. My mother, very displeased at my late timing, sent me up to my room. I don’t know why parents think sending their kid to their rooms is some sort of punishment. My room is one of the best places in the world.

After a few average days, the weekend finally greeted me with opened arms. I had just received 3 letters in the mail about playing college ball. I was beyond excited, which was abnormal because lately nothing excites me the way it used to. Another small but triumphant accomplishment I had completed was I finished 2 full meals for a week straight. I haven’t ate that much or so healthy for months. I began to question my abnormal luck. So with my depressing amount of free time I decided to make my way back to the Chinese restaurant to try and make sense of it all.

Once arriving at 53 Paxton Avenue, I looked for the same petite woman I had encountered a few days before. I saw her arm quivering while trying to deliver a tray of drinks to a nearby table. Once she made her way back to the cash register, I stopped her and asked for a minute of her time. She turned around and gasped when she realized who I was.

Trying to recollect herself, she took a deep breath and asked “Table for 1, miss?”

I shook my head, “No, I was wondering if I could talk to you. About the other day you know.”

I could tell she was contemplating a conversation with me. With an aggravated sigh, she nodded her head and led me to a back room.

It was obvious she didn’t want to talk so I began, “How did you know?”

“Know what dear?” she sighed,

“Everything! About my eating disorder, about the lucky numbers, about which fortune was mine and which was my mom’s. Why did it matter?”

She hesitated while trying to find the words that corresponded with her thoughts, “ February 10th marked the Chinese New Year, the year of the Black Water Snake. The snake brings unexpected transformations to our lives. Change is always right around the corner, but it’s up to us if we choose to walk that way. The truth is anyone could have received that fortune, but I knew that you were the only one who really needed to hear it. It’s not so much luck that brings good things to our life, it is opportunity. ”

“But why me? How could you tell?!” I whined with complete irritation and confusion.

“I could smell the despair and sadness off of you from miles away. I’ve had experience with those days and it’s a time I would never choose to go back to. Maybe I have some sort of supernatural powers like you’re hoping I do so it can all make sense, or maybe I handed you that fortune simply because that is exactly what it is. Your fortune. Your destiny. A better day is coming, that’s not luck, my dear. That’s purely fate. Stop wasting time asking yourself why and when. Start asking yourself questions that matter, questions that will help you get from here to there.” The woman spat out the last remaining words of wisdom I’d ever hear from her, but they were enough. I knew from that point on they’d ring in my ear.

So with that, I stood up and thanked her for her advice, but I would soon find out I was thanking her for a lot more. I walked home taking all sort of obscure routes and turns. I thought long and hard about my life. I thought of my selfishness and my failure to take responsibility to my own mental state. For the longest time, I was consumed with sadness. I was disgusted with myself, but it was too hard to accept that. It was easier to point fingers at the people around me because they were a part of my unhappy life. I was mad at my friends because they could only distract me and numb the pain, but they couldn’t eliminate it. I was mad at my mom because she never could find the right words to say, and I never looked deep enough into her actions to realize what she really meant. I was mad at my therapist because I was paying her thousands of dollars to ask me the same things, although I never tried to answer them in a different way. It didn’t make sense that things weren’t getting better and it didn’t make sense that no one could help me, but in that moment of clarity and transformation of my thought process; I knew that I couldn’t be saved by anyone other than myself. That is the only key to happiness. Yourself. If I don’t accept the way my life is, or the people in it, or how I look or act, then how am I ever suppose to find some sort of happiness? So for the rest of the way home I looked deep into my bitter soul and dissected and rethought every critique I have ever gave to myself. Somewhere along the way I must not have noticed the rest of the world or the boy walking beside me. He was

almost as much lost in thought as me. I let him finish his self-reflection because I had already finished mine before turning to him and saying hi.

His face transformed into pure delight, “I never thought I’d see my Jane again.”

With his face so lit up mine seemed to follow, “Me either, it gets pretty wild here in the jungle. It must be your lucky day or something.”

He laughed at my lame attempt to keep his smile planted on his face” So I’ve been thinking about the other day. I’ve been trying figure out what such a beautiful girl like you has to worry about. Then after a while I get too sad, thinking about someone like you, being so upset with her life. It’s not fair that good people are stuck with such sorrow and baggage. I know I’m passing boundaries and I’m probably making you feel uncomfortable, but I just can’t stand to see you unhappy. I want to help you and I want you to help me too, would you let me do that?” He blurted out his words so fast it took me a second to understand what he was saying.

“I would love that.” So he grabbed my hand and we walked in silence. The silence we shared wasn’t because we were thinking about ourselves but this time we were thinking about each other.

Gradually everything in my life began to change. It wasn’t in a blink of an eye and I don’t believe it was because of some sort of magic. I think things changed and got better because I was willing to let them do so. I was sick of being sad and I was ready to get better. It might have took me 32 calories from a fortune cookie, a number 9 jersey and scholarship to Michigan State to play soccer, 2 encounters with the most perfect guy to later fall deeply in love with him, a visit to 53 Paxton Avenue to talk to the wisest women I ever met, and 96 long days till full recovery from my eating disorder... to make me discover adventure and passion in myself, but I’m glad I did. I realized all sort of beneficial things about my life. I came to the conclusion that my mom meant well and that she loved me with all of her heart. She led me to recovery and I know for the rest of my life I will owe her the words “thank you”. I’m not sure if the black snake brought complete transformation to my life or if I’m responsible for the change, but I’m not sure if that part matters much. I’m a work in progress and I’m under full construction, but I’m reinventing myself in ways I never imagined. I know that one day soon I’m going to be a completely fixed and on that day I’m going to become that person I’ll be proud of.