

They discovered the first one in the cupboard. It was neatly packaged in a thin layer of crystal colored cellophane and as Miriam reached above her head and into the cupboard to retrieve the small sachet her hand brushed the thick web like layer of dust on the bottom of the cupboard. She brushed the top of the cellophane clear of sticky grey dust and cradled her new possession in cupped hands. It was difficult not to jump for joy at having won the game her brothers had invented but a few minutes before but she managed to maintain a calm façade as she turned to face her brothers.

Brennan and Michael anxiously awaited a verdict from their younger sister on whether the kitchen cupboard had in fact contained anything. It had been clearly obvious that there was *something* in the cupboard because Miriam had reached above her head and was now clasping that same something at her waist in front of her but it didn't seem to mean anything until Miriam had completed that awestruck turn and a breathy, "Yes..." escaped the barricade of her falsely 'o' shaped lips. There was a brief lag as the single syllable word and the image of a fortune cookie sank into the recesses of the two boys' brains but then with a glance and a smirk, panic ensued.

Miriam fell back onto the ground as her older brothers made gasps and grunts for the cookie, each aiming to claim the right of winner of the game of exploration. Miriam's fall to the ground had caused her to squeal in false agony, and her father burst into the room just as the boys split the package. The cookie spilt to the ground and crumbled revealing an aged, yellow slip of paper. Amidst both scolding and consoling words Miriam snatched the paper from the floor and tucked it into her pocket. Her father who finished his lecture helped Miriam up and sent her to begin sorting boxes for the more necessary of items. Being a quiet girl she agreed with a nod and bounded into the living room which was, at the moment, looking more like a box of Lego's rather than a living room and read the label on the first box. 'Brennan and Michael clothes'. Miriam smirked. She took the nearest Sharpie and scribbled across the words.

"Won't be needing those..." she muttered and read the label on the next box. 'Brennan and Michael's room'. She flourished her Sharpie pen and set it against the box to repeat the procedure but just as she did she remembered the fortune slip in her pocket. Her hand slid against the rough fabric of her pants pocket and clasped around the slip of paper. She produced it and held it close to her face as she read the words there.

*The Golden Rule is a handy tool, unless you enjoy looking a fool.*

Miriam immediately looked up at the box where she had scribbled across her brothers' names. She glanced back at the words on the small rectangle of paper, and her mother walked in the room.

"Miriam dear, do you know where Brennan and Michael's clothes are? Brennan ripped a nasty hole in the knee of his pants."

Miriam's spine prickled and she felt a wave of heat wash over her cheeks as she gestured to the box with the large black spot.

Miriam's mother looked at her incredulously, "Did you scribble over this?" she asked.

Miriam could only nod and slowly fold the fortune into a diminutive square and replace it in her pocket.

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Later that same day, around noon time, the family gathered in the kitchen for a brief family meeting. Brennan stood on the edge of the group, clutching a treasure in his hand. It was a fortune cookie. When Brennan had found the cookie in the folds of an abandoned shower curtain in the bathroom, he'd been surprised, but then his delight soon followed at having bested his sister for the only whole fortune cookie. Now he was bored with the meeting and his attention was directed at the lump in his hand. He stepped behind his mother, out of sight of his father, and slowly opened the fortune cookie. The cellophane made very little noise and the cookie was broken with matching silence. Brennan eased the small paper out of its niche and flipped it to reveal the fortune.

*A wise man learns to listen.*

"Brennan?" His father's voice jolted Brennan from his reverie over the fortune.

"Yeah...?"

"Have you heard a single word I've said?" His father was staring at him over the top rim of his glasses.

"I—uh—" Brennan glanced down at the fortune, embarrassed, and then noticed a few more words on the end of the fortune.

*, and to speak when spoken to.*

Brennan could have sworn the words were not there before.

"Brennan? Are you going to answer?"

Brennan could only stand, dumbfounded, and stare at the faces of the group. When he reached Miriam's face however he saw a strange mix of curiosity and understanding written on her features as her eyed flitted between his fortune and his face.

"No," Brennan managed to say, shifting his gaze to his father's face.

His father sighed heavily, "Go with your mother and try to make yourself useful."

Brennan nodded stiffly and tucked the fortune into his pocket.

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Michael shook his head at his brother's ignorance. He knew that his brother was excited about the new house and his fortune cookie find but sometimes younger brother just didn't get it. When his father dismissed the meeting, Michael went with Miriam to finish sorting the boxes in the living room. It was only a few steps from the kitchen and Michael counted the steps aloud out of sheer boredom.

"One, two, three, fo—" On the fourth step, the step in the doorway from the kitchen to the living room, there was an audible crunch as he set his foot down. Michael immediately backtracked a step and saw a crushed fortune cookie. He was grateful to see that it was still in its package, sparing him the cleanup of a thousand little crumbs, he was not grateful, however, that it had been there at all.

"Miriam!"

His younger sister poked her head above one of the larger boxes, "Yeah?"

"Did you leave this fortune cookie here?" He scooped up the crushed package and held it by the corner at arm's length in front of him as if it was full of disease.

Miriam's face crinkled into a sarcastic glare, "No. You can't *always* blame me." She ducked behind the box again.

Michael rolled his eyes and walked to the trashcan. He opened the fortune cookie slowly and threw away everything but the fortune. He was only mildly curious as he brushed crumbs off of the paper and read the words under his breath.

*"The hard worker is always finding a way to be useful. Accept no distractions."*

Michael snorted in a highly condescending way. The fortune didn't apply to him—he was probably the hardest worker in the whole house—in his opinion anyway. He was just about to feed his fortune to the trashcan when—*THU-CRUNCH*. Michael stuffed the fortune into his pocket as he rushed into the living room. With one look at the room Michael knew what had happened.

Miriam stood, cheeks flushed above an upside down box labeled, 'Dining Room China'. Her eyes told the whole story: The box had been too heavy for her and she had dropped it.

Michael pulled the piece of paper out of his pocket and stared at it without really seeing it. If he hadn't been concerned with the fortune cookie he would have been here to move the box, and the china wouldn't be ruined.

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It was not until later that night that Brennan, Miriam, and Michael had a chance to confront each other. Each had their fortune in their hand, ready to be the evidence if their possessors were met with disbelief.

Michael broke the silence, his voice whipping out at Miriam, “Where did you get these fortune cookies?”

Miriam’s eyes were wide at first, betraying her surprise at the accusation and then they narrowed into flashing slits, “*I* didn’t get them from anywhere.”

They rounded on Brennan.

“ME?!”

“Shhhhh!” Miriam and Michael said.

Brennan dropped his voice, “You can’t be serious! We just moved in!”

“And we didn’t eat Chinese food or anything on the way here...” Miriam added thoughtfully.

“So what then,” Michael said, “The people who lived here before us were obsessed with fortune cookies? Seriously, what are the chances that *three* fortune cookies are just laying around?”

Both Miriam and Brennan were silent at that, neither knew the chances, but they both suspected their older brother would fill them in.

“Little to slim that’s the chances. And what are the chances that—” But he didn’t finish, instead looking at his fortune with a sense of horrified wonder.

Miriam and Brennan also stared at their fortune cookies knowing the question but afraid to sound crazy by stating the thought out loud.

“No one could have known,” Brennan said finally.

“No one,” Miriam agreed and Michael nodded his accord.

“So, what?” Brennan asked, “If no one could have known then do we call it a co-wink-i-dink and move on?”

Michael took a deep breath and set his jaw, “Yes.”

Miriam and Brennan both seemed unnerved, and Miriam finally said what none of them had had the courage to say.

“But it *fit*. You can’t tell me that yours had nothing to do with the situation at hand.”

Brennan and Michael exchanged glances and Michael spoke with all the determination he could muster.

“It was coincidence.”

And that ended the conversation. The kids all stood and moved into the next room where their parents were setting up for a light dinner. It took a few minutes for Miriam to set the table with paper settings and a few more for Brennan and Michael to quiet down, but then they served and began eating dinner.

However, laughter was soon cut short by a knock on the door.

Miriam had stood and was ready to run and answer the door when her father stood and said, “I’ll get it.” Miriam sat down again, and turned her imaginary hearing aids up to hear the conversation. She couldn’t hear anything but the laughter and the good bye at the end of the small talk, followed by the closing of the door. Her father entered the room soon after, a smile on his face and set a basket down on the table. Miriam lifted the corner of a towel over the top of the woven wicker basket. She dropped the corner as if it had scalded her hand and looked at her brothers, her eyes as wide as saucers.

Brennan and Michael scowled in concentration and confusion at their sister’s reaction. Brennan shrugged then and Michael threw the towel off the top of the basket. Their intake of breath was sudden and in unison.

“Isn’t it great?” Their father asked, “She made them herself.”

“Who’s ‘she’?” Michael asked picking up one of the small packaged cookies.

“The lady who lived here before us,” His father picked one up also, “She said she thought we could use some friendly advice living in a new town.”

Brennan and Miriam reluctantly picked up a fortune cookie. The three children glanced at each other and cautiously broke open the packages and, setting the cellophane on their plates, split the cookies.

All three messages read the same thing.

*Gifts are tokens of friendship when given unexpectedly.*

“How appropriate!” Their mother exclaimed setting the two halves of cookie down and then reading her fortune aloud, “Gifts are tokens of friendship—”

Miriam, Brennan, and Michael all stopped listening and looked at each other, wide eyed and disbelieving. Then they snapped their hands towards the basket and each grasped another cookie.

Despite their parent's protests they threw the cookie and wrappers to the ground. Then they read their fortunes out loud, their voices ringing in unison.

*Today is the first day of the rest of your life, but also the last day of your life so far...*