

The Way the Cookie Crumbles

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Ever wish you were a millionaire? Maybe after this dark tale you will think twice...



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Steven Huang did not like his job. Scratch that. He *hated* it. *Loathed* it. *Despised* it. Those are far more fitting adjectives to describe his current views as to his vocation for lack of a better term.

He stepped through the doors of Far East Food Products Ltd., his current employer and sat himself down on the uncomfortable desk chair in front of the Macintosh computer.

Few of the other workers in the plant even paid heed to his existence and even if they did, it was a distant sultry nod or wave at best.

He placed his University of Toronto knapsack by his side and played with the mouse to remove the burning fireplace screensaver that was present. He was not particularly in the most festive of moods; not because of his job mind you, no, it was more to do with the fact that the University of Toronto had still not yet responded to his application to their illustrious Bachelor's of Pharmacy Program.

He was now in his fourth year of undergraduate work, fighting his way through his honor's Bachelor of Science degree in organic chemistry. He could still hear his father say, a shit or get off pot in reference to his further academic career.

The program was tough to get into; the more pessimistic students saying *impossible*, but Steven knew he had the goods, it was just getting the academic admissions committee to see it the same way.

It was highly competitive, admitting only 130 students a year, most of which have A+ academic averages. Steven had applied twice in the past, having failed to be accepted with a high B+, but he knew this year was make or break, otherwise he would have to choose an alternate employment route for the rest of his earthly existence.

So, here he was working at Far East Food part-time making the current Ontario minimum wage of \$ 10.25/hr. His job? Writing the fortunes that people get when they open up a fortune cookie in a restaurant.

Yes, that was his **job**.

Well, when you think about it, someone has to do it; just not many people think about it or consider it as a prospective career. Steven hadn't either.

The fact of the matter was, his father, Wei Huang (Walter to his Canadian friends) was a hard working architect who had grandiose plans in mind for his only son. He knew that Steven did not have much time on his hands for work or extracurricular activities such as sports or short story writing, however he was able to snag him a part-time job three hours per shift, three days per week at Far East Food.

You want iPad? I call it ipay! his father would proclaim. Steven knew he needed to make some bread..soon.

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Far East Food was owned and operated by Wei's best friend, Kai-Ming Ho that had grown up with him in his native Peking.

Kai-Ming (Kevin to his Canadian friends) readily accepted Steven and gave him a hand on the job training.

Kevin's English was passable, not great and he often spoke to Steven in alternating Cantonese and broken English to which Steven always replied in plain English.

Wai, dim ah?

Fine, thanks. How are you?

You type one thousand fortunes today.

That's about it for training.

So off Steven went, typing out "Your lucky numbers are 6, 13, 24, and 48." About 500 times in a row.

Like, how many people can possibly have the same lucky numbers? Who was he kidding? Sometimes he would mix up the numbers adding in a 36 or 93 for good measure.

Other times he would create alternates: "A smile at a co-worker will lead to greater things", or "Make that impulsive purchase. It will prove valuable."

Would anybody take this stuff seriously?

Like, could Steven imagine some office dweeb wearing a white collared shirt and tie grinning the entire day at his co-workers because of what he read in a fortune cookie the day before?

Maybe so.

When he got bored of the typing out the mundane fortunes, Steven would regard the workers around him. Few spoke English and even if they could, even fewer actually spoke to *him*. He knew the routine of mass fortune cookie making to a tee after countless observations:

First, a nameless, faceless worker would dump an entire bag of sugar into a steel mixing machine (20% of fortune cookies are pure sugar) and then add golden food coloring. Melted vegetable shortening would be added to the concoction along with starch and water. The worker would then put in pastry flour for texture and the machine would begin its duties. In a few moments, flat yellow pancakes would be spurted out onto a conveyor belt that was pre-heated to keep the dough soft and then automated steel prongs would insert his typed fortunes and mold the dough into their traditional crescent moon formation. These were then individually packaged by additional workers into plastic wrapping and placed into a box for shipping.

The company made five thousand per day.

Steven had written so many fortunes over the course of time, there were always extra to spare, but not many. When one thought about it, the entire process was contingent on his ability to churn out quality fortunes 9 hours per week.

To break the mind-numbing monotony of his job, especially when he was in moods like he was in today, Steven would attempt to dream up dark fates like "An anvil will drop on your head today" or "Your

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dog will acquire venereal disease.â

Something stopped him though. What if these crazy things did come true or the people that read them took them seriously? Strange as it seems, maybe, just maybe some cosmic force aligned the manufactured yellow dough and his streams of paper to synthesize some fantastical gift for someone out there. Or was it just coincidence?

Regardless, he wasn't about to jeopardize his meager income for the sake of a lark at someone else's expense. Steven even knew of people that kept the fortunes in their wallets and purses in the naive hope that someday that good fortune that *he* wrote would smile upon them.

On typing he went, worrying about a tomorrow that may not ever come in the back of his mind.

Then a thought occurred. What if he could make a fortune for *himself*? Would that be worth anything?

â You will get into Pharmacyâ he typed. Didn't mean much to your average Chinese restaurateur, but to him it meant a truckload.

â Every woman you meet will want to have sex with you.â He paused after writing this one. *Do I really want that?* he thought. *What if I start getting like bag ladies or horny senior citizens coming onto me?* *Fagetaboutit.* His cursor quickly deleted this from the Word document.

Then the final one. His lifelong dream.

â You will become a Millionaire.â He even capitalized the â Mâ . Like it had status.

Ah, that was it! Who wouldn't want a fortune like that one? He printed off the pages upon pages of pre-fabricated fortunes, saving his own personal ones at the end for a separate page.

He carefully cut the one about pharmacy and the millionaire into strips. He looked over his shoulder cautiously to see if Kevin was watching and once assured, slipped them into his wallet. He also kept a paper one dollar bill in there courtesy of the Canadian government's decision to replace it with the silver dollar-sized â loonieâ coin. A fat lot of good that had brought him thus far.

At 1:00 p.m. his shift was over. He did not have any afternoon classes that Thursday so he went home to study for his upcoming finals in Quantum Mechanics, a necessary requirement for his B.Sc. degree.

By the time his Toyota Corolla rolled onto the driveway of his suburban home in Scarborough, Ontario, Steven was tired. More so than usual. Make that *exhausted*.

Weird for him as he was typically a fireball of energy, but three hours of typing out ridiculous fortunes amidst the monotonous drone of the background machinery will do that to you sometimes.

He made his way up to his room and lay down on his bed. He regarded some of the posters of the wall of his icons; Kid Rock and Foo Fighters to name two. He also had a vintage velvet Led Zeppelin one in psychedelic coloring, but that was in basement storage for now.

He put the ipod earphones in, hands behind his head while lying on the bed and immersed himself into Pink Floyd's 1970's epic â Echoesâ as he slowly drifted off into a deep slumber.

When he awoke several hours later, it was insane.

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For one, his body appeared to be smothered in some sort of liquid medium, akin to olive oil, with a tangy smelling scent prevalent.

The space was dark. Dark to the point that he could not see his hand in front of his face, if he could even raise his hand.

Which he couldn't.

No, he was paralyzed, unable to move any particular limb, upper or lower, with the same syrupy goop travelling down his entire torso.

"Hey! HEY!" Steven cried to no avail.

He tried in vain to extend his arms forward into the blackness, but with paralyzed arms, what could one do?

"Shaddup will ya?" , cried a voice from afar.

Steven turned his head in the limited space available. "What? What do you mean?"

"I mean shaddup! What is there to understand?"

Steven detected a thick Brooklyn accent on the speaker.

"What! why are we here?" he asked.

Laughter erupted. From more than one voice. Several.

"Sweet that," said a female with a distinct Bostonian accent, "I'll bet ya wished to be a millionaiiah? Did'ntja?"

Steven swallowed his throat. The scent of fish was enough to make him vomit. "Yeah, yeah I did."

"Yeah well," the same accent continued, "Ya got ya wish. You a Millionaiiah. A Millionaiiah **SARDINE**."

Steven's mind went into a tailspin. A *fish*? That's what he had become? Despite his dreams, despite his effort, despite his education?

Another voice came through about three bodies down. "Yo, dawg, that's what we *all* wished for, true. Now we's messed up in this shit-ass oil until someone opens up our canned ass."

Oh crap.

All he had to do was write, "You will get a million *dollars*" and his fate would have been changed.

Or would it have?

Steven tried in vain to move his arms which no longer existed. They were *fins*. And *preserved* fins at that.

"So, I'm stuck here. In a *sardine* can?" he stated with panic in his inflection.

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“Thas it dawg,” the other voice stated. “Don’t mattah what yo ass did before, no mattah what yo do now. Same ass shit.”

Steven thought. And thought some more.

The next day, Walter Huang, Steven’s father got a letter from the University of Toronto. Congratulations! Steven got accepted to the pharmacy program. But he was not home. *I think he said he was going to a party with some of his wacky U of T buddies. Yes, that was it. Just some party. Good to go tomorrow.* He put the letter of good news on the kitchen table and went to make himself a sandwich.

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