

Chapter One

It was Family Night. Thursdays had become the night that my parents and I would spend together, just the three of us. Lately, we had made the rounds of most of the restaurants and malls. We were running out of things to do around town!

I sat on one of the kitchen chairs listening to my parents in a heated debate that threatened to ruin everything!

“I say we go to the Steak House.” Dad said.

“We were there two weeks ago!” Mom countered.

“Well, where would you like to go?” Dad asked, exasperated.

“Sea Food Palace sounds good to me,” Mom stated.

They seemed to forget all about the reason we were going out in the first place! I looked at Samson the Great, who sat next to me, swishing his tail on the floor and cocking his giant head from one side to the other as the debate continued.

“Ahem!” I stood up out of my chair. “Remember me?”

That stopped them. Their faces turned red as they looked at me. Hanging their heads, they looked at each other.

“Of course we remember you, Rose,” Dad said. “We didn’t see you come in.”

“I’ve only been sitting here for ten minutes,” I replied.

The Chinese Fortune Cookie

Well, it was probably only five minutes but it seemed like ten! There I was, all dressed up in my new jeans and Reeboks, New York jacket and my Yankees ball cap. My face was scrubbed and my hair was fixed in my best ponytail ever!

Before I get too far into the story, I should tell you a little more about me. My name is Rose, Ramblin' Rose. I used to go to the Brookhaven School for Girls in my hometown of Minneapolis, Minnesota, where I was the editor of the school newsletter. I also published it online for curious readers of all ages. But that all changed when my Aunt Susan and I were kidnapped and taken to Russia!¹

Now I'm home schooled, but I still write the newsletter for English credits, and I also publish it on the web.

My parents, my whole family for that matter, work in security. They used to work for the Agency but formed their own business after my dad retired. Now I'm an agent too, even though I'm only twelve years old.

Sheesh! Seems like I've been twelve forever!

"Earth to Rose, come in, Rose!" Dad was trying to get my attention.

Guess my mind was ramblin' again. I looked up at Dad and smiled.

"Where do *you* think we should have dinner?" Mom asked.

Finally! Somebody asked *me*!

"Well, remember when I was six and we went to visit Grandma and Grandpa for a few days?" I asked, suddenly finding the solution.

Mom and Dad looked at each other, blushing.

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“You mean when you stayed with them while Dad and I went on a second honeymoon?” Mom said with a dreamy look in her eyes.

“Yes,” I answered, “I still don’t know where you guys went, but I remember going out to eat with Grandma and Grandpa!”

“And where did you go?” Dad asked, knowing I was leading up to something.

“We went to a Chinese restaurant. That’s where I got my first fortune cookie!”

“Do you remember what it said?” Mom asked.

“I still have it,” I said proudly. “It says, *‘Your curiosity will bring you great rewards’.*”

Thankfully, the mood in the house changed and Sam began to get excited.

“Okay, I know where we’re going!” Dad announced, finally catching on.

“The Chinese Buffet!” Mom and I said together as Sam’s thunderous barks shook the dishes in the china cabinet.

Chapter Two

The Chinese Buffet was always busy on Thursday nights, but we had decided to eat early so we could all watch a Charlie Chan movie later. There were not too many people there when we arrived.

We stood by the ‘Please Wait to be Seated’ sign and a young Chinese waiter approached us.

Smiling, he asked “How many?”

Sheesh! We were the only ones in line!

“Three,” Dad said, amused at the protocol.

The waiter looked around. There were lots of empty tables; I wanted to sit in the back by the wall length mirrors with the big picture of the Chinese countryside. It was sort of like being there.

But instead, he seated us at a table closer to the entrance. This one looked down the hall past the restrooms and out the back door to the alley. I wondered why he sat us at this particular table. Maybe he didn’t like us.

“What’s wrong, Rose?” Mom asked. “You don’t look too happy.”

“Oh, nothing, but I was hoping for a different table,” I replied.

“Well, a table’s a table,” Dad said. “Let’s eat!”

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I shrugged off the disappointment and headed for the buffet. One of the things I liked about this place was creating my own custom dinner! I could be as creative as I wanted and nobody cared! I had to go easy on the desserts though, especially the almond cookies. Besides, my favorite thing was the fortune cookie at the end.

While we were eating, I listened to the oriental music playing in the background and looked around at the décor, trying to imagine that I was in China. I wanted to see the Great Wall and the beautiful trees with the pink blossoms. What a great story for my newsletter that would be!

Between bites, Dad had been talking with Mom and was soon up for another run at the buffet. Mom followed and I sat, finishing my first course with dessert on my mind. My eyes shifted as I lifted the chicken wing to my mouth, and I noticed the activity at the end of the hall out in back.

A large truck was parked there. Two of the waiters were catching boxes labeled 'Fortune Cookies' from another man unloading them from the back of the truck.

"Must be the supply truck," I reasoned and continued to watch them work as I ate.

There were about a dozen boxes piled on the cart behind the second waiter. He set the next one on the stack and turned for another, arms outstretched and hands ready to take the box from the man in front of him.

The man in the truck did not throw this box. Instead, he handed it down to the catcher, who almost collapsed under its weight. Sweat on his brow, he strained to hold it and turned to the man behind him, catching me watching as he did.

Something in his look bothered me. First he appeared angry when he noticed me watching and sent me a 'mind your own business' look, but then his expression changed.

The Chinese Fortune Cookie

As if he knew me, a smile of recognition crossed his face, and he relaxed a little as he handed the heavy box to the man with the cart.

I looked closely at the box. Even at this distance, I could see it was labeled exactly like the other boxes.

Wheeling the cart to the door, the men waved to the man in the truck and brought it inside. Closing the door behind them, they turned into the kitchen.

The whole thing left me feeling a little strange. When Mom and Dad came back with their plates, they noticed the look on my face.

“Hey Rose, are you okay?” Dad asked as he set his latest culinary masterpiece on the table and sat down.

“Thought you’d be on dessert by now,” Mom added.

“Yeah, just ramblin’ thoughts again,” I said, wondering if I should mention anything about the heavy box of cookies. Even a full box could only weigh a few pounds!

“Well, they just put out some fresh desserts.” Dad said hungrily.

I wondered how he could eat so much and not get fat!

That brought a smile to my face. I shrugged off the supply incident and turned my mind to sweeter things.

The one thing I had to ask my parents for was a refill on the occasional Coke they let me have. After finishing dessert, the waiter returned with the check and the traditional fortune cookies.

Usually, they just set them on a little tray with the check underneath them. This time was a little different.

Smiling as if he knew us better than he did, he set down a little tray with two cookies on it. When I looked for the third one I began to worry.

Maybe I had taken too many almond cookies!

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But the waiter smiled and took one from his white jacket, tossing it to me as he did.

“That’s right,” he said, “There are three.”

I caught the cookie, careful not to crush it. When I looked up to thank him, he was gone.