

Dreamweaver

Lauren Hallstrom

Copyright 2013 by Lauren Hallstrom

All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means – electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, scanning, or other – except for brief quotations in critical reviews or articles, without the prior written permission of the author.

This is a total work of fiction. Names, characters, incidents and many places are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, to real names, places or events is entirely coincidental.

Printed in the United States of America
by Snowfall Press.

ISBN 978-1-937862-51-0

Published by BookCrafters, Parker, Colorado.
SAN-859-6352, BookCrafters@comcast.net
<http://self-publish-your-book.com>

Cover design by Shantana Judkins
and Susan O'Brien.

Copies of this book may be ordered from
www.bookcrafters.net
and other online bookstores.



*To my family,
who said they knew it
all along.*

Prologue

The citizens of Fortune had always been superstitious. It was how they'd been raised from childhood, something they grew up believing and never stopped. Ever since Roger Garrison had found a stray penny lying in the place that was now the town square, the citizens had looked for luck all around them and clung to it. That penny had been facing heads up, which was a sign of good luck. Roger Garrison had gone on to found a small town there, and he named it Fortune because, as he said, someone could always find luck there, whether it be good or bad. Not long after, he became extremely wealthy and spent the rest of his life traveling the world.

For this reason, the citizens embraced every sign of good luck, hoping for the good fortune that penny had bestowed upon their founder, and they looked for every opportunity to pass it on. Maybe that explained the knowing smiles on several peoples' faces when the old man entered the grocery store.

The old man was smiling as well. His eyes crinkled and each wrinkle, each small crease on his face became more pronounced and more visible than before. He didn't mind.

He stood near the entrance of the supermarket and watched the shoppers pushing carts past displays of precariously stacked pyramids of canned goods and cereal boxes. They all seemed to be in a hurry, as if they'd rather be anywhere than in a store that smelled of freshly baked bread. He shook his head in dismay.

The man watched as a little boy and girl ran in circles around the cart their mother was pushing. The mother looked annoyed, but the man was delighted. It was good to see children. This was just the chance he had been waiting for.

The boy skidded around the cart once more and grabbed the rim for balance. He pushed his feet off the ground and jumped into the basket of the cart. This startled his mother, who stopped with her hand to her heart. The girl watched her brother from outside the cart. "No fair!" she cried, "I want to ride in the cart too!"

The mother threw up her hands in exasperation. "Thomas, after five minutes you need to get out. Then it will be Molly's turn." She resumed pushing the cart. The old man imagined the cart wasn't as easy to handle now that there was an energetic young boy inside.

The man stepped out of the corner and rummaged around in the pocket of his brown jacket. From it he produced a shiny penny. It glistened and gleamed under the harsh light of the supermarket.

The man slowly walked forward and placed the penny on the floor in the middle of the aisle. He was

careful to place it heads up. That was important. He backed away to watch what followed.

Molly, Thomas, and their mother headed directly toward the spot where the penny lay. No one had noticed it yet. Suddenly, Molly squealed and raced toward the penny. She picked it up in her small hands and lunged at her mother to show her. "Look, Mommy, a lucky penny!"

At this, a smile lit the man's face. Children are very clever, he thought to himself.

"That's nice, honey," her mother answered absentmindedly, checking the price of bananas. "You can put it in your piggy bank."

The old man turned away, satisfied. That little girl would have a good day. A very, very good day.

As he left the store, the man heard Molly ask, "Can we go buy a trampoline, Mommy?"

This time her mother looked straight at her. "You know, that's the funniest thing. I was just thinking about that. I think we can arrange for an early Christmas present for you two."

The little girl's huge eyes said it all.

Chapter One

"I look like a Christmas elf," I moaned as I stared at myself in the mirror. I loved green, and I loved the emerald knee-length dress I was wearing. But with a mane of dark red and a sprinkling of freckles, I looked more like a holiday commercial than a fifteen-year-old girl going to a party.

"Oh, come on," my mother said lightheartedly, "This way you can wear it again when we go visit the relatives at Christmas!"

"Mom!" I shrieked, and burst into laughter, with Mom joining in. After a moment, I gasped for breath and started hiccupping, which just made me laugh harder.

Finally we both managed to calm down. "What do you say we head out now, Audrey?" Mom asked me. "We'd better or we'll be late."

I sighed and nodded my assent. My gaze returned to the mirror once more. At least my hair was smooth and relatively straight, but it was a deep, dark red that stood out from my super

pale skin. If you looked, you could even see small yellowish hairs intermixed with the red ones. I used to joke that while most people's hair turned gray as they aged, mine would be completely blond by age thirty.

I reached out to steady myself as I stood. I was wearing high heels, and I hadn't quite gotten used to them yet. Before I got to the door I grabbed the black sweater hanging from a hook on the wall. It was a good thing too, for as soon as Mom opened the front door a chilly breath of air accosted me. It was only September, but it already felt like winter.

Mom followed me out and gave an inadvertent shudder. "Let's hurry," she urged. "It's cold enough already."

The fall party was held each year in the town's school gym. We lived in such a small town that driving really wasn't necessary—everything was within walking distance. Still, I didn't enjoy the walk into town when it was as chilly as it had been lately. Since we lived on the outskirts of town, it was a longer walk than I would have liked.

Thankfully, it wasn't too long before a large brick building came into view. It was a building I knew well as I had gone to school there for the past ten years.

Across the double door entrance hung a bright orange banner that read: *Town of Fortune Annual Fall Celebration* in big letters. Everyone in Fortune was welcome, and it certainly looked like the entire town had come.

Mom squeezed through the entrance and wove through the crowd inside while I followed close behind. People shot looks of annoyance over their shoulders, but when they saw who it was their faces

relaxed and they smiled. Mom was well known in town for her kindness and sweet disposition. She was the one person who was always willing to help when a neighbor lost a dog or the school needed a volunteer for a special event, and so she had earned many favors over the years.

“Why, Pheraby Waverly, how very good it is to see you!” A high, gracious voice interrupted my thoughts. I looked up and immediately recognized the town gossip, Mrs. Tweedy. Fortune wasn’t so small that everyone really knew everyone, but I did know quite a few people.

Mom recognized her too. Mrs. Tweedy made her way daintily through the crowd and stopped in front of us. Mom clenched her teeth and tried to smile politely. “Hello, Mrs. Tweedy.” Mom abhorred her first name Pheraby, and went by her middle name Elaine. Mrs. Tweedy paid no mind to that though, and was the only person in town to call Mom Pheraby. Personally, I loved the old-fashioned Southern name that had been passed down for generations in her family. Besides, I thought Pheraby was a prettier name than Elaine, but I kept my mouth shut.

While Mrs. Tweedy chatted with Mom about how expensive cantaloupe had become, I busied myself with looking around at the other people already here. I recognized Mrs. Jenkins from the grocery store and several classmates in the crowd.

Mrs. Tweedy now turned her attention to me. “Why, Audrey, honey, look how much you’ve grown!” she exclaimed giddily, patting me on the head. “Before you know it she’ll have herself a young fellow,” she proclaimed to my mother.

I felt my face flush bright red. I’m sure it was a

wonderful combination with my hair. Mom smiled at me sympathetically, but Mrs. Tweedy didn't notice my discomfort and kept talking. "Oh, and you two simply *cannot* forget to take a fortune cookie!" She gestured at a bowl off to the side of the room. "I got one already. It said I'm going to find myself a penny richer in the near future! That's always a good thing, isn't it?" I gave her a big fake smile, hoping I could slip away when she wasn't paying attention. No such luck.

Mrs. Tweedy herded me and Mom over to the fortune cookie table. It wasn't really a Chinese-themed party, but Fortune's fortune cookies were a tradition for almost every party or get-together. I didn't mind them, but Mom thought they were pointless and silly. "Why don't you go ahead and have one, Audrey," Mom suggested. She added, "I'm not that hungry right now. Maybe I'll have one later."

I knew she wouldn't, but I didn't say anything. I grabbed a cookie from the bowl and broke it open after glancing up at Mrs. Tweedy, who had her hands clasped together in anticipation. I extricated the small slip of paper from the cookie and turned it over. The tiny, perfectly shaped words were printed in red.

Your choices will decide the fate of those around you.

Well, that was ominous. An unexpected shiver ran up my spine. "What does it say?" Mrs. Tweedy wanted to know, leaning forward.

I looked up at her with feigned nonchalance. "Oh, the usual. It's ridiculous." I was relieved when Mom suggested we get some punch, and we said goodbye to a disappointed Mrs. Tweedy.

I led the way to the punch table. This building served as the school for every age group in Fortune. With students from ages five to seventeen, it was a very crowded place, especially during a party.

As I neared the punch table someone bumped against me and I stumbled. I fell headlong into the table in front of me. Mom caught my arm just before I dunked my head into the punchbowl, but the damage was already done. Several students snickered. At least they had the decency to hide it behind their hands.

I straightened carefully and summoned all of my dignity. I plastered an amused smile on my face and took a deep breath.

“Do you want to go home?” Mom whispered.

Almost imperceptibly, I shook my head. I wouldn't give them the satisfaction.

Our house looked different at night. In the daylight it was cheerful and greeted people with its pretty shade of yellow paint, a white picket fence, and lovely little flower gardens against the house. But returning in the dark after the party, the house appeared to be masked in shadows. It was a hulking dark figure amidst a sea of long, drying grass.

We went inside and Mom cheerfully suggested a salad for both of us. I smiled at her gratefully and agreed. My good mood had returned. I was never upset for very long. I didn't need to be. Besides, where did being upset ever get me?

I watched Mom run a hand through her dark, choppy hair and then rip pieces of lettuce with her nimble fingers. She never minded cooking or preparing food. In fact, she loved it. Cooking was

soothing and methodical for her. Somehow I always managed to dump half of the milk on the floor or burn the toast for breakfast. That's why Mom didn't ask me to help and I didn't offer.

While I waited, I wandered into my room. Our house was a one-floor cottage. It was a little cramped, but that's how I liked it.

My room was located directly across from Mom's and next to the bathroom. I flopped down onto my turquoise beanbag chair next to my stereo. Out my picture window that made up nearly an entire wall in my bedroom, I could just make out the tall grass in the distance, swaying in a light breeze.

Absentmindedly, I picked up a miniature snow globe. I shook it and watched the snow flutter down and finally settle over the tiny features and carvings of the town of Fortune inside. My father had given it to me years ago. I still remembered that day well.

It had started as a normal day like any other, but it ended perfectly. I had the week off from school and I was spending it playing board games with Mom, mostly *Candyland*. I loved that game. I had made a new rule that the winner got to eat a handful of Skittles from a bowl we kept on the counter. We had played five games, and I'd already eaten four handfuls of the candy. When we finished the sixth game, Mom asked me, "What should we play now?"

"*Candyland!*" I screeched gleefully.

"Again?"

"Yes!"

Suddenly I heard a door slam and a deep voice call out, "I'm home!"

“Daddy!” I yelled and ran to him, my bare feet padding against the hardwood floor.

“Whoa, now!” he called, laughing and spinning me around in a circle. Then he set me down. “I have a little something for you.”

My eyes sparkled and I grinned up at him. “What is it?”

Dad carefully pulled something out from his coat pocket. The tissue paper crinkled as he removed it from the gift and tossed the paper aside.

It sparkled in the light and I gasped. It was a snow globe. I shut one eye and peeked in the glass to get a better look. Many houses were lined up one by one on either side of a street. I saw shops and restaurants with names too tiny to see. And off on one side was a little meadow with snow-covered grass and a little yellow house.

“It’s Fortune, isn’t it Daddy?” I asked with delight.

“It sure is,” Dad laughed. “Now, whenever you want, you can watch it snow over the town of Fortune.”

I lunged forward and wrapped him in a huge bear hug. He scooped me up and set the snow globe on the hall table. “How about we go outside and play for a while?” he suggested.

I rode piggyback to the backyard. We had a large oak tree with a swing that hung from the thickest branch. Dad put me on the wooden seat and began to push me higher and higher. I giggled and held tight to the ropes on either side, tilting my head up and staring as the huge expanse of never-ending sky came closer. I closed my eyes and reached out, imagining my fingers were brushing the clouds. I was a bird, and Dad was my wings.

I sighed and blinked my eyes several times. Without realizing it, I had started to cry. It wasn't a particularly sad memory; in fact, it was my best one. My perfect day. Wistfully, I looked out the window again and closed my eyes.

Chapter Two

I must have fallen asleep. Soft morning sunshine streamed in from my window and I stretched, awkwardly getting up from the floor. My muscles were extremely sore and tight, which made me regret sleeping half on a beanbag chair and half on a rug for twelve hours.

Suddenly a giant white fur ball landed on my head. "Rice Krispies, Shelby!" I hollered, "Give me a little warning before you do that!" My cat meowed at me as if to say, "I didn't do anything," and commenced licking her paw.

Then I realized where she had jumped from. Papers and books from my desk were strewn across the floor and a cup full of pens had fallen over. "Bad cat," I scolded Shelby, petting her at the same time. She looked at me warily for a moment but then relaxed, apparently deciding I was not much of a threat.

I walked into the kitchen ten minutes later and found Mom waiting for me. “Good morning, sleepyhead,” she teased.

I knew that I hadn’t returned to the kitchen for salad last night and hastened to explain. “Sorry, Mom, I didn’t mean to—”

She cut me off, telling me it was fine. “More Bacon Bits for my salad that way!”

At the table, I chugged down a glass of orange juice and inhaled a bagel. Mom eyed me and laughed. “Hey, what’s the hurry?”

I swallowed a mouthful of bagel. “I’m going out hiking.”

“Okay, just don’t forget your coat. It’s chilly.”

As I grabbed my coat from the hook, I happened to glance at myself in the mirror mounted on the wall. Two large eyes stared back at me—one green and one chocolate brown. No one else I know has two different colored eyes. I guess I’m just different. People call me quirky, and I suppose I am. But when I stand waist-deep in tall grass as far as the eye can see, or next to a river that roars so loudly it obscures my thoughts, it doesn’t matter. Nature doesn’t care what I look like.

I left the house, letting the back door swing shut behind me, and trudged through the grass and crunchy leaves on the ground. I had no idea where I was going—my feet seemed to take over, as usual.

As I walked, the landscape turned from flat, empty fields to slight hills and denser patches of trees. I was heading away from town toward the wilderness beyond.

I felt dampness in the air and thought that it might rain—or snow. It certainly was cold enough for it.

When I finally reached my unconscious destination, I parted the branches of the trees and entered the clearing. I smiled at the familiarity of it all. This was where I went whenever I needed to listen to silence for a while. Not complete silence, for the sounds of the rustling of leaves and the birds leaving their nests for the winter were present.

I cleared away some of the fallen leaves from the ground and found the circles of mushrooms on the forest floor. They were called fairy rings. I didn't believe in magic, but this clearing was a powerful place to me. I picked a few blue wildflowers and put them in my hair. Sitting down on a log, I sighed in contentment. To me, this place was perfect—fungus and all.

In the trees further on, I knew there was a little stream with large rocks along both sides. I could hear the gurgling and rushing of the water even now. I didn't usually go that far into the forest, though. To get to the stream I had to climb over the rocks along its banks. I didn't like the thought of standing up so high with nothing but shallow water to break my fall.

I glanced at my watch and did a double take. More time had passed than I thought. A beautiful place can do that to you.

I hurried my pace on the way home but I hadn't gone even halfway before it began to snow. I didn't mind, though. I turned my face to the sky and tasted the snowflakes on my tongue. They melted immediately, and I laughed. Webs of snow crystals formed on my hair, and flakes coated my eyelashes. It was more often cold than not in Fortune, but it never snowed enough for me. The snow picked up fast, and soon it covered every surface with a

thin layer. If I didn't get back soon, Mom would be worried.

Eventually, I arrived home. No one was upset that I was late—not even Shelby, although she did give my snow-covered shoes a curious look.

The old man walked along the path that was blanketed with fallen leaves. The snow had mostly melted, but it had moistened the leaves, turning the red- and yellow-speckled things into a soggy mess.

A cool breeze blew across his weathered face and caressed the folds of his large jacket. One penny remained in the shadowy confines of the coat pocket, waiting to see the brilliant light of day.

All the rest had found themselves on the wooden floor of the old dance studio or on the empty seat of the merry-go-round. Those pennies had surely changed lives.

The lone penny shifted inside the pocket, awaiting the call of the old man.

Surrounding trees watched his progress along the path, and the atmosphere was heavy and ominous. The old man did not notice. The shadows grew and lengthened as the sun lowered itself over the mountains and the area went quiet.

He wasn't aware when the penny slipped out of his pocket and hit the ground with a *ping!* He didn't notice it roll along the slabs of stone on the edge of the dirt pathway.

The penny hit a crack in the stone and came to an abrupt stop. The tails side faced up. The man had no idea, and the sense of foreboding that arose in the air did not warn him of what was to come.