

THE BACK STORY OF AND GUIDE TO HOPE AND FORTUNE

By Marissa Bañez

Taken at face value, *Hope and Fortune* is a modern-day fairy tale in which a child finds herself in a scary situation. Multi-generational, multi-racial, multi-cultural and multi-gender characters of different shapes and sizes give her advice to live by and then show her the way to safety and security. The illustrations are very colorful and beautifully rendered to capture a child's attention.

But I deliberately designed *Hope and Fortune* to be more than what meets the eye. Because children's illustrated books are usually limited to 1000-1500 words, I expressly curated my illustrations to supplement the text of *Hope and Fortune* and create a multi-layered story with deeper significance. In writing and illustrating *Hope and Fortune*, I learned that numbers, colors, and animals represent or symbolize certain ideals and principles that dovetail nicely with what I wanted to say in the book. I then incorporated a lot of that symbolism to make the story as multifaceted as possible. My hope is that the illustrations will result in further discussion and engender curiosity among all readers, both the young and the not-so-young.

Am I asking too much for my readers to read between – and beyond – the lines? I neither intend nor want to pressure anyone. For those who choose not to do so, I hope they'll still enjoy the story and lovely illustrations, without having to delve into the less obvious aspects of the book.

For others, I want to present a challenge for them to see and do more. I want this book to grow with the child. With each reading, I hope the child sees and appreciates new things. So, for those who choose to rise to the challenge, I wish them the best experience in exploring and discovering the many aspects of *Hope and Fortune*.

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A. Esperanza (the protagonist)

Esperanza is the Spanish word for hope. I want all young children to be full of hope.

I wanted Esperanza to represent all children, regardless of gender, as they begin to explore their world and path into adulthood.

I intentionally dressed Esperanza in jeans, T-shirt and sneakers in normal and neutral colors, instead of a fluffy pink, purple or sparkle-y outfit. Of course, there's a space for the use of frothy outfits in children's books and I don't mean to malign that. To each her/his own. But that type of outfit would be out of place in *Hope and Fortune*, as I wanted to render Esperanza approachable and relatable to modern-day girls and boys.

B. The Butterfly

Butterflies are exquisite and pleasing to the eye. We often see children running after butterflies and sometimes crying after the fruitless chase.

Because the butterfly is a non-threatening, child-friendly thing, I chose it to represent physical attractiveness. I wanted to show through the elusive butterfly that oftentimes a thing of beauty that we chase will leave us, making us feel sad and lost. More important, I wanted to show that such a situation, hurtful and frightening as it may be, could represent a new beginning and opportunities.

As the Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu said: “What the caterpillar calls the end, the rest of the world calls a butterfly.” With Esperanza practically gliding confidently over a path of flowers at the end of *Hope and Fortune*, we see her as her own beautiful butterfly.

C. Golden Tree

Before *Hope and Fortune*, I wrote an unpublished children’s story, using trees and fruit seeds to demonstrate the circle of life. In that story, the new tree growth was golden with purple and white leaves. I chose to put Golden Tree in this story because of what its colors represent – ideals that permeate *Hope and Fortune* in various forms and different ways:

Gold - success, achievement, fortune

White – purity, innocence

Purple – wisdom, creativity

D. The Fortune Fairies

I’m often asked why I have 12 (as opposed to any other number) Fortune Fairies. The honest answer is that I had no particular rhyme or reason for the decision.

After I wrote the story, I was pleasantly surprised to read that the number 12 symbolizes emotional, mental, and spiritual growth and enlightenment. The perfect number of fairies for this book!

Why designate the fairies as “Fortune Fairies”? When I wrote the book, I wanted a nice alliteration with the word “fairy” with an optimistic feeling. Because my fairies were dispensing life advice intended to bring good fortune to Esperanza in her path of life, I decided on “Fortune Fairies.”

As more fully explained in the following pages, each Fortune Fairy was conceived with very particular specifications and considerations. I illustrated many of them with animals that I refer to as their “spirit animals.” In spiritual traditions in certain cultures (for example, some Native American cultures), people use animals to represent kindred spirits to guide or protect them. The various spirit animals I portray in the illustrations personify the views and ideals of their respective fairies.

THE FORTUNE FAIRY OF HOPE



The Fortune Fairy of Hope represents several things.

First, she is my late Filipina mother. My mother’s favorite color was green, which explains the prevalence of green in the illustration. Also, her favorite flower is the gardenia, which is drawn on the bell sleeves of her top. And the many gardenia bushes by our house in the Philippines are mimicked in the bushes in the background.

Second, she symbolizes the Philippines. Apart from her physical coloring of slightly darker skin and black hair, the top of her outfit was drawn to evoke the *terno*, with the distinctive bell sleeves of the Philippine national dress. Her skirt is meant to look like the typical red-and-black Igorot/Ifugao cloths worn by the indigenous peoples in and near Baguio City, where we lived in the Philippines. Like Ifugao women, the Fortune Fairy of Hope wears multiple brass bangles, called *giniling*.

Finally, she represents all mothers – Filipinas and otherwise – who wish and pray for only best for her children. That’s signified by the universal “prayer hands”.

THE FORTUNE FAIRY OF INNOCENCE AND WONDER



I intentionally chose a boy to be the Fortune Fairy of Innocence and Wonder. As with most people who grew up with the Disney version of Tinker Bell and little pink or purple fairy outfits for girls only, I never knew that the term “fairy” is not gender-specific. Plus, boys who didn’t like sports, GI Joes, cars/trucks or anything deemed “macho” were oftentimes derogatorily referred to as “fairies” to mean gay.

I want that narrative to change. So, I chose blue – usually associated with boys – for the pants and wings of the Fortune Fairy of Innocence and Wonder.

The fact that he is a young wide-eyed boy surrounded by puppies, kittens, chicks, baby rabbits and little birds signifies youthful purity and curiosity, without any gender-based judgment.

Finally, because I wanted my Fortune Fairies to represent different ages/generations, the Fortune Fairy of Innocence and Wonder is the ideal symbol of youth.

THE FORTUNE FAIRY OF TRUTH AND VIRTUE



The Fortune Fairy of Truth and Virtue is a combination of Lady Justice (representing the moral value of Truth with the blindfold and scales of justice) and Lady Liberty (representing the principle of Virtue with the torch of enlightenment to liberty).

The illustration also represents some of the best of the “American ideal.” Apart from the obvious reference to the Statue of Liberty, I chose the bald eagle, the American national emblem signifying strength and dignity, as the fairy’s spirit animal. Moreover, the mountains in the background are meant to evoke the lyrics of *America the Beautiful* that signify the country’s beauty and magnificence: “For purple mountains majesties . . .”

THE FORTUNE FAIRY OF GENEROSITY AND KINDNESS



Continuing the theme of the American ideal, the illustration for the Fortune Fairy of Generosity and Kindness shows the “fruited plains” from the song *America the Beautiful*.

The hands-to-heart symbol on the torso of her dress is the universal symbol of kindness. The filled horn-of-plenty and her feeding the deer is meant to show that abundance should be shared.

I also intentionally drew her to be “plus-sized”, darker in complexion and with green eyes to show not only that physical beauty comes in all sizes, shapes and colors but also that her size and color pale in comparison to the non-physical beauty of her generosity and compassion.

The deer as her spirit animal represents gentleness (which is just another word for kindness) and re-generation (which is what fruits and vegetables do when properly cared for).

THE FORTUNE FAIRY OF STRENGTH AND COURAGE



I've always found the female Asian warriors depicted in Asian shows inspiring. To me, they are the epitome of strength and courage. Especially with Asian women oftentimes believed or depicted to be subservient or meek, I love that the female Asian warriors defy that image.

The Fortune Fairy of Strength and Courage is not meant to be of any specific Asian nationality; she is supposed to be pan-Asian. The red of her outfit signifies power and passion, while the gold is for majesty and success (the white/silver belt just looks good with the outfit).

As a symbol of protection and agility, her spirit animal the black cougar represents a fierce protector, just like the fairy herself.

THE FORTUNE FAIRY OF RESPECT AND DIGNITY



The gray suit, bright red pumps, stance and no-nonsense attitude of the Fortune Fairy of Respect and Dignity shows a sense of self-esteem and self-possession that telegraphs: “Don’t mess with me.” She represents all women – especially women of color – who have had to struggle and ultimately overcome all the prejudices and injustices that working in a still-male-dominated work environment entails.

Aside from being a beautiful bird, her spirit animal the peacock is symbolic of respect, honor, and dignity. Also, its tail is reminiscent of a crown, which ties in nicely with the fairy’s advice to “[a]lways hold your head high as if wearing a crown.”

THE FORTUNE FAIRY OF CONFIDENCE



The Fortune Fairy of Confidence celebrates and honors the resilience and confidence of Black women, with their “can-do” attitude in the face of so much adversity. So, I gave her a Rosie the Riveter vibe with her head scarf (done in a more stylish manner) and arm flex. The denim jumpsuit and the work boots are meant to say: “Let’s get down to work and get this done.”

In some African cultures, the leopard symbolizes power, tenacity, survival, and self-reliance. It’s the perfect spirit animal for this fairy.

THE FORTUNE FAIRY OF IMAGINATION



I don't think that the general population is very familiar with the fact that Muslims contributed greatly to the European Renaissance and, by extension, to the development of European/American civilization and culture. Muslims contributed a tremendous amount of information and ideas through the arts, astronomy, mathematics, science, and medicine.

With the Fortune Fairy of Imagination, I hope that non-Muslim readers will ask why the artist is wearing a head scarf, which may lead to a conversation and exploration of the Islamic influences in the good things of our lives. I also hope that Muslim readers will recognize themselves in this illustration and find it empowering in a positive way.

The color teal means open communication and clarity of thought. Without open communication and clarity of thought, we would not have benefited as much as we have from Islamic contributions to our civilization and culture.

The fox is symbolic of intelligence and cleverness, making it the appropriate spirit animal for this fairy.

THE FORTUNE FAIRY OF HAPPINESS



Even babies dance when they're happy! Yellow symbolizes optimism, joy, and happiness. Add a bunch of colorful flowers and who wouldn't feel happy just looking at this exuberant picture of a carefree, laughing and dancing bare-footed fairy?

One of the symbolic meanings of a dancing crane is grace and good fortune – the ideal spirit animal for the Fortune Fairy of Happiness.

THE FORTUNE FAIRY OF BEAUTY



I chose not to depict “beauty” with a person’s face because what is beautiful is a personal ideal informed by one’s world view. Therefore, the concept of beauty defies a universal representation. And, in my view, “beauty” as a concept cannot be limited to physical characteristics.

In trying to figure out how to illustrate the Fortune Fairy of Beauty, I remembered a wonderful episode of *Star Trek* in which a race of aliens were evolving from their corporeal states into beings of pure energy. That made me think of energy as our spiritual essence or life-force. To me, a beautiful spirit will always win over a gorgeous face with an ugly personality.

Thus, the Fortune Fairy of Beauty as a heart radiating positive and bright energy was born. As she says: “Beauty is not what you see with your eyes but with your heart.”

THE FORTUNE FAIRY OF WISDOM AND INTELLIGENCE



I wanted the fairies to be multi-generational from the little boy as the Fortune Fairy of Innocence and Wonder to an old woman of wisdom and intelligence, with everyone else in between. More often than not, old women in traditional fairytales are depicted as miserable crones or scary witches. As with the boy fairy, I wanted to change that narrative by depicting an old woman as representing wisdom and intelligence.

I also wanted to honor and pay tribute to my alma mater, Princeton University, as a great institution of learning and knowledge. Orange and black are Princeton's colors but orange is also a symbol of meditation, inspiration, and creativity – building blocks for wisdom and intelligence.

The tiger is the university's mascot and symbolizes high intellect and confidence.

The university generously granted me permission to use its shield logo.

THE FORTUNE FAIRY OF LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP



The Fortune Fairy of Love and Friendship is inspired by Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* (as, of course, Venus is the goddess of love):



For readers unfamiliar with the painting, I hope it might motivate them to look for and appreciate the beauty and meaning of Botticelli's work. I also hope they'll wonder why the shell is there . . . which may lead to some discussion and exploration of Greek and Roman mythology. If it doesn't, it's still a nice illustration. Perhaps as the readers grow up, they might see the real or reproduction of the real painting and hopefully recognize it as the inspiration for the illustration.