Money Makes Worries

A Tale from China

(STUDENT VOLUME, P.5)

Chen was a rich man who lived many years ago. He had so much money that he was always busy investing it, lending it, and paying taxes. From morning to night, he never had a moment's peace. He had little time to eat—he never had dinner until late at night.

His wife pitied him for all the worries he had and kept saying to him, "Look after yourself. Please don't work yourself to death." Chen agreed with her, but he did not know how to stop working.

His neighbor, Ti, was very poor. He and his wife together earned just enough to keep themselves alive. Ti was a good workman, and it was usually evening before he stopped work. Then he went home, gave his wife the money he had earned, and worried about nothing else. If he was in a good mood, he sang songs. That was his only amusement; at least it didn't cost any money.

The sounds of Ti singing and of Ti and his wife talking could be heard in Chen's house. But Chen was too busy going through his checks and bills to pay attention. His wife, however, was saddened by the happy sounds.

When Chen finally sat down for his evening meal, the sounds from Ti's house could still be heard. Chen's wife said to him, "Listen, Ti sounds so happy, although he is so poor. We are so rich, and yet we are never happy."

"Have you never heard the proverb, 'The penniless man has plenty of time'?" asked Chen. "He can be happy because he is poor. It would be quite easy to make him quit singing. We need only give him some money." "If you do that, he will become even happier," answered his wife. "Wait a little while," said Chen. "If you still hear him singing, I will admit I was wrong."

Next morning Chen invited Ti to his house and gave him a great deal of money. Never having dreamed of such a gift, Ti could only stammer out, "Many thanks for your kindness." He took the money and rushed home excited to tell his wife all that had happened. Now he no longer went to work. He did nothing but wonder how to use the money. He couldn't decide. Now when he came home, he was late for dinner and gulped it down quickly. Naturally, he had no time for singing or playing. He couldn't sleep at night thinking about the money.

Chen and his wife listened carefully to hear what their neighbor Ti did. There was no sound of singing. "Was I right?" Chen asked his wife. His wife smiled and admitted he was right.

For two nights Ti could get no sleep. On the morning of the third day the God of Luck appeared before him and said, "Money makes cares. Think of that, and bother no more about it."

Ti understood and, leaping out of bed, he hurried and gave the money back to Chen.

Ti felt as though a weight had been taken off his heart. He went home and slept like a baby. The next day he went out to work and, in the evening, the sound of singing and playing was once again heard coming from Ti's house.

The Tortoise and the Rabbit

A Fable by Aesop

(STUDENT VOLUME, P.9)

One day a rabbit watched a tortoise walking slowly. He began to make fun of the tortoise's short legs and very, very slow pace. The tortoise laughed and said, "Rabbit, though you can run like the wind, I will beat you in a race." The rabbit couldn't believe what he heard. He thought it was impossible and accepted the challenge.

They asked a fox to set up a racecourse. On the day agreed upon, they met at the starting line. The two started together. However, once the rabbit was far ahead, he stopped at the side of the road. Trusting his natural speed, he relaxed and fell asleep. The tortoise all this while never stopped for a moment. He walked on with a slow and steady pace to the end of the racecourse. Finally, the rabbit woke up and ran on as fast as he could. When he reached the finish line, he saw the tortoise already there resting after the exhausting race.

The Tortoise and the Antelope

A Tale from the Ngoni People

(STUDENT VOLUME, P.11)

An antelope and a tortoise once had an argument. The antelope said, "Tortoise, are you able to run with me?" And the tortoise replied, "Of course I can." "Then tomorrow," said the antelope, "we'll race in the fields from the large tree near the hill to the stream." The tortoise was surprised at what he had agreed to do. He immediately went to tell the other tortoises what had happened. "The antelope and I were talking about running and somehow I agreed to race him tomorrow. My friends, you must come along and help me." The tortoises went to the field, and the tortoise who had to race placed them in a line, from the large tree to the stream. They were all hidden in the tall grass when the antelope arrived. The antelope saw his opponent by the tree, and said, "Come on, Tortoise, let's run." Then the antelope set off as hard and fast as he could. He ran and ran, and finally called out, "Tortoise, how are you doing?" From way up ahead of him, he heard a tortoise reply, "I've passed there long ago." So the antelope ran even harder. Finally, he called out again, "Tortoise where are you now?" Again from far out in front he heard a tortoise. "I'm up here. I passed there long ago." The antelope had been running hard and was exhausted. When he heard this second reply, the antelope gave up and left the field.

The Parable of the Greedy Sons

A Tale from Persia

(STUDENT VOLUME, P.19)

There was once a hardworking and generous farmer who had several lazy and greedy sons. On his deathbed he told them that they would find his treasure by digging in a certain field. As soon as the old man was dead, the sons hurried to the field and dug it up from one end to the other.

They found no gold at all. Believing that their generous father had probably given the gold away, they abandoned the search. Finally, they decided that since they had already dug up the land, they might as well plant a crop. They planted wheat, had a good harvest, sold it, and made a big profit.

After they harvested the wheat, they wondered again whether the gold might still be there. So they dug the field again. Once again, they found no gold, but they planted more wheat with the same result.

After several years of this, they stopped being lazy, got used to hard work, and became honest and happy farmers. They also became wealthy through their hard work and stopped thinking about the treasure. Finally they understood their father's trick as his way of teaching them.

The teacher, like the farmer, is also faced with students who are impatient, confused, and greedy like the farmer's sons. He has to get them to do something that he knows is good for them, but whose true purpose is hidden from them because they are so young.

An Unlucky Man?

A Tale from Nigeria

(STUDENT VOLUME, P.25)

There was once a poor man who had nothing but scraps for himself and his wife to eat. Nearby lived a rich man with many farms, children, and animals. One day, a man far wealthier than either the poor man or the rich man passed by on the road. However, the traveler wore rags, and he looked like a beggar. He approached the rich farmer and greeted him. But the rich farmer said, "How dare you speak to me? For all I know, you have some dreadful disease." So the traveler went on, and came to the poor man's farm. "Hello, how are you?" he said. As soon as the poor farmer heard the traveler, he asked his wife to take their scraps and prepare food for their visitor. The traveler in rags took the food, ate it, and thanked his host.

When the traveler reached home, he said, "I must reward the man who was kind to me." He filled a box with money. Then he took his daughter back to the area near the farms. "Do you see that man working there with his wife?" he asked. His daughter saw them. "Take this box and give it to him." The daughter obeyed, and approached the poor man. "I was told to bring this to you," she said. The poor man stared at it but didn't look inside. "Please, first take it to my rich neighbor. Let him take as much as he wants and leave us the rest." The girl obeyed him and approached the other farmer. The rich farmer opened the box and saw the money. He filled his pockets with all of the money and had his servants put flour into the container. "I've taken some. You can return the rest to my neighbor," he said to the girl. When the poor man received the box again and saw there was some flour in it, he was delighted. "Thanks to God," he said. "Pour it into this pot." The girl did as she was told and departed.

Her father, the very rich traveler, had been watching everything from a distance. As he realized what was happening, he became more and more enraged. "If you put an unlucky man into a jar of oil, he would emerge quite dry. I wanted that poor man to have some luck, but he was made to be unlucky, and nothing will change him."

Life and Death

A Tale of the Blackfeet

(STUDENT VOLUME, P.27)

Once there were only two people in the world, a man and a woman. They met as they traveled around and the woman said, "You and I should come to an agreement and then decide how future people will live." "I agree," said the man, "but only provided I have the first say in everything." The woman accepted as long as she could have the last word.

The man began thinking about how the new people should look. "Our children and grandchildren should have eyes and mouths in their faces. I think it would be best if these were straight up and down. The mouth should begin at the chin and end at the forehead." "I agree," said the woman, "that they should each have two eyes and a mouth, but they should start on one side of the face and go across to the other." "Very well," said the man. "How will these people work? Their hands need fingers, many fingers. Ten on each hand would be good." "Oh no," said the woman. "That would be far too many. With so many, the fingers will get in one another's way. There shall be four fingers and one thumb on each hand."

They went on in this way until they had decided everything about their descendants. Then the woman asked what they should do about life and death: should people live forever or should they die? This was very hard for them to agree on. Finally the man made a suggestion. "I'll throw this stick into the water. If it floats, people will live forever. If it sinks, they will die." He threw the stick into the water and it floated. "No," said the woman, "we mustn't decide that way. I'll throw in this rock. If the rock floats, people will live forever. If it sinks, they will die." The woman threw in the rock and it sank. "There," she said. "It's better for people to die. If they didn't die, they would never feel sorry for one another. There would be neither sympathy nor pity in the world. And people would never help one another." When the man heard what she said, he agreed with her. "Yes, let it stay that way."

Sometime later the woman had a daughter. After a short time, the daughter became sick and died. The woman became very sad that people did not live forever. So she said to the man, "I was wrong. Let's talk about life and death again and reconsider." The man listened and thought about it. Finally he said, "No, we have settled it once and for all."

The Symposium
by Plato
(STUDENT VOLUME, P.29)

Socrates and Diotima had been discussing love. Diotima disagreed with Socrates' account. She stopped him and said, "Socrates, you don't describe love very well. That's because you're thinking about what it's like to be loved. Instead you should focus on what it's like to love. Let me tell you a story that will help.

"Aphrodite is the goddess of Beauty, and is herself the most beautiful of all the goddesses. On the day she was born, there was a great party. One of the guests was Resource. He, as his name suggests, is very resourceful and inventive. He is the son of Skill. After dinner, the goddess Need came to the door begging. She had heard the noise from the party and wanted to satisfy her unsatisfiable needs. Now, at just this moment, Resource wandered out into the garden. He had had too much to drink and fell into a heavy sleep. Need saw this as her great opportunity. If she could have a child with Resource, she thought it would help lessen her poverty. So she slept with Resource. Their child was Love.

"Because Love was conceived on the day Aphrodite was born, he became her follower. He is attracted to all beautiful things and people. As the son of Resource and Need, he is similar to both parents. He always needs something. He is not delicate and lovely as most of us picture him. Rather, he is harsh and dry, barefoot and homeless. He always feels his mother's poverty. But he is also like his father. He uses all his father's resourcefulness and invention as he pursues beauty. He is brave, energetic, a great hunter, very impetuous, and full of tricks and plans. He is at once full of wisdom and also full of desire. He is neither like humans who die nor like gods who never die. On the same day, he can be both. When all goes well, he is alive and blooming. But later he might start dying, and then be born again through the resourcefulness he inherited from his father. Like his mother, he keeps needing more. Since Love is a great seeker after truth, he wants what is truly beautiful. He keeps looking. But, if Love finds out that what he loves is not really beautiful, he dies."

"I'm sure what you say is right," said Socrates. "But what good can Love be to us humans?"

"Love includes every kind of longing for happiness and beauty," Diotima answered. "Everything we do is prompted by some kind of love. We don't realize clearly that those who we say love money or power or sport or music or knowledge are as truly lovers as those who love another person. In one sense they are all the same, though they disagree on what is truly beautiful."

Truth and Falsehood

A Tale from the Middle East

(STUDENT VOLUME, P.31)

Once upon a time, Truth met Falsehood at a crossroads. Falsehood asked Truth how he was and whether he felt well. Truth answered, "It gets worse all the time." Truth looked miserable. He was very thin and dressed in rags. "I haven't eaten for a while," he said, "and everywhere I go I find that more and more people dislike me. There are always fewer and fewer people who really love me and those are treated badly by others."

"I'll show you how to be liked by people," answered Falsehood. "Just come with me. You'll dress well, eat well, and be happy. But you must do just as I do and never disagree with me in public—never disobey me or say I'm wrong."

Truth was so unhappy and hungry and cold that he agreed to do as Falsehood said. So they set off together. When they reached the nearest large city, they went to the first restaurant. Falsehood ordered a magnificent meal for both of them. They ate their fill and stayed at the table a long, long time, until nearly everyone else had left the room. Then Falsehood clapped his hands and called the headwaiter. Because Falsehood was dressed so well, the headwaiter bowed low, and asked how he could serve or help them.

"I gave the boy who served us a hundred dollar bill an hour ago. How much longer must I wait for him to bring change?" asked Falsehood. The boy was called, and he said no one had given him a hundred dollar bill. Falsehood started to shout and appeared very angry. "This seemed such a fine restaurant," he said, "I would never have thought I would be cheated. It just shows that you can never tell anything at all by appearances. But I shall tell all my friends never to come here again." With that, he threw a hundred dollar bill on the table and told the headwaiter to bring him the change.

Because he was afraid this fine gentleman would give the restaurant a bad name, the head waiter did not pick up the money from the table. Instead, he gave Falsehood the change he demanded. Falsehood stormed out of the restaurant and Truth followed. When they were safely outside, Falsehood burst out laughing and said, "There! That's how I make things work out for me." But Truth said, "I would rather die of hunger than do what you do."

Maxims

by Francois La Rochefoucauld

(STUDENT VOLUME, P.37)

1. Why do we tell our deepest secrets to others? Usually because we want them to feel sorry for us or admire us.

2. It is very difficult to love someone we don't respect. But it is just as difficult to love someone we respect much more than we respect ourselves.

3. Everyone dresses up and acts the way he wants others to think of him. So you might say that the whole world is made up of people playing different parts.

4. Some people always say and do foolish things. They are valuable because they serve a useful purpose. They would upset everything if they changed their behavior.

5. Lucky people do not try to improve themselves very much. Usually good luck makes their stupid or bad actions work out successfully. This makes them imagine it's really because they were right or good or smart.

6. If we ourselves had no faults, we wouldn't get so much enjoyment from seeing the faults of other people.

The Knight's Tale

by Geoffrey Chaucer

(STUDENT VOLUME, P.39)

Prince Arcite and Prince Palamon, both from Thebes, were the closest of friends. They were captured in war and locked up together in a prison tower in Athens. One day Palamon looked into a courtyard and saw Emily, a beautiful princess. He immediately fell in love with her. His friend Arcite, hearing Palamon speaking about her aloud, came to the window. He too immediately fell in love with the same woman. The men quarreled. They became jealous of one another, and their friendship was destroyed. Sometime later Arcite was freed from prison on the condition that if he were ever found in or near Athens, he would be killed.

When Arcite heard about his freedom, he felt sick. He cried and cursed the day of his birth. "My freedom is worse than my prison. Here in this tower, I would have been happy forever. Palamon, you are lucky. You, at least, can look out of the window and see Emily every day. And fortune can change. Though you are in prison, you are near her. You may be released and have the woman you desire. But I must leave and live at home in Thebes, an exile from where I wish to be. We never know what we want and pray for. We always look for happiness in the wrong place. I was convinced that if I could only get out of prison, my happiness would be a certainty. Now I am free, but since I cannot see Emily, I am like a corpse. In searching for happiness, we are like a drunk who knows well enough that he has a home but doesn't know where it is.

Palamon, when he learned the news, screamed in anger. "Arcite, you've won. You can walk freely in Thebes, your home. You can raise an army and go to war with Athens. Perhaps through some bold attack or a treaty, you will gain Emily for your wife. Your position is so much better than mine. You are a prince again and free. I must remain here dying in a cage. Fate, which rules the world, is cruel. It treats men no differently from animals. But an animal may, at least, do what it pleases. Men, however, are often jailed for no reason at all and others who do harm go free. There is great misery in the world."

So the summer passed and its long nights increased the torments of the princes. I don't know which of them had it worse. Palamon is condemned to perpetual imprisonment until he dies. Arcite, exiled from Athens on pain of death, can never see his beloved again. Let me put the question to you, lovers and readers. Who had the worst of it? One of them can see Emily every day from his window, but stays in prison forever. The other, free to go where he pleases, may never see Emily again.