

The Clever Daughter

Long, long ago there lived a merchant in a prosperous town. He and his wife worked hard together, so their business went well. But after working hard for many years, his wife fell sick. She seemed to be getting worse and worse. The doctor said that her illness was incurable, but might be treated with some rare medicine from Korea. He loved his wife very much. Although the medicine cost more than he could afford, he kept buying it. He gradually exhausted his supplies. At last he borrowed some money from a loan-shark. Unfortunately the medicine didn't help. Finally, the sick woman passed away. The merchant was left with a heap of debt. He got so depressed he couldn't do anything for a while. His daughter was worried sick about her father.



Right after the funeral, the money-lender visited the merchant.

"I'm terribly sorry about your wife. But I have to tell you that your debt is due today. I'm here to collect the money. If you can't pay it, I'll sue you. But you should know I'm not such a merciless man. I'll give you a chance to be free of debt. Allow me to marry your daughter, and I'll cancel all that you owe," the money-lender said without hesitation.

In truth, the money-lender had wanted to marry the merchant's beautiful daughter for many years. Even though he was much older than she, he'd once made a proposal, but she hadn't accepted it. Neither the merchant nor his daughter was pleased with his second proposal. The merchant was humiliated that he didn't have enough money to pay his debts. The only they could do was to ask the money-lender to put off the payment a little longer.

A few days later the money-lender showed up again. He smiled at the merchant's daughter and said,

"I have a good idea. Why don't we play an interesting game? I don't think your father has enough money to pay off his debt right now. But this game will save him. I'll put two stones into this empty bag here. One is white and the other black. Put your hand in the bag and take out one of the stones. If the stone is black, you will marry me and your father's debt will be cancelled. If it's white, I'll cancel not only the marriage but also the money I lent to your father. Both ways, your father will be fine. Keep in mind, if you refuse to play this game, I'll sue your father. It's certain that he will be thrown into prison."

The merchant's daughter had no choice. She reluctantly agreed to play the game. They went outside. The merchant's yard was covered with lots of small black and white stones. The man picked up two stones and put them into his bag.

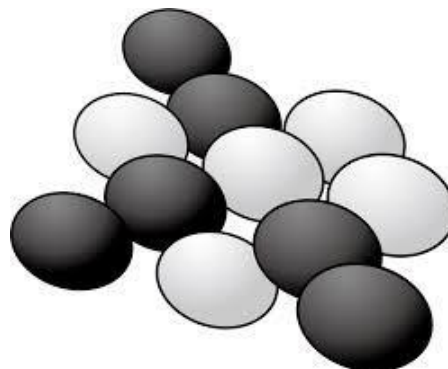
"Now, take one of them out," he said.

She made up her mind and put her hand in it. She took out a stone, but accidentally it dropped from her hand. The stone rolled around and hid itself among the other stones.

"Oh, I'm sorry. How careless I am! It slipped away before I checked its color." She crouched and picked a white stone up.

"I think this is the right one," she said.

In reality the stones under their feet were so similar to each



other no one could tell which stone she dropped.

The man went red and cried loudly,

"That mustn't be the right stone! It should be black!"

The young woman also cried,

"Why are you so confident? If you check your bag, you'll be able to tell which color of the stone inside. The opposite color must be the one I picked up."

Of course he knew that the stone she'd taken up was black as he himself intentionally put two black stones in the bag. But he couldn't confess to her what he had done. He obliged to admit that the stone left in the bag was black. He also had to admit that the one she'd taken up must have been white.

"That lady is far more clever than I am," he thought.

As the money-lender had promised, he gave up the marriage to the young lady and the merchant's debt was canceled. (2006.12.1 With Itaya)

賢い娘

むかし、むかし、ある商人（あきんど）がにぎやかな町で暮らしておりました。夫婦共々一生懸命働き、商売も順調でした。働き続けて十数年、妻は病に倒れてしまいました。悪いことに、病は日々重くなっていくようでした。医者にも、回復の見込みはなく、望みがあるとすれば朝鮮からの妙薬のみと、言われました。夫は妻が痛いとおしく、手に負えない程の薬代にもかかわらず、買い続けました。やがて蓄えも底をつき、ついには金貸しから借金する羽目になりました。残念ながら、薬の効力はありませんでした。病気の妻はついにこの世を去ってしまいました。商人に残されたのは山のような借金だけ、落ち込んでしばし何もできませんでした。娘はそんな父がとても心配でした。



葬儀が済むや、金貸しがやってきました。

「奥様のことではまことにご愁傷様です。こんな時言いにくいのですが、ご用立てしましたお金の返済日は今日までとなっております。お金をいただきにまいりました。もし返していただけないのなら、訴えてもよろしいのですが。とはいっても私はそのような血も涙もない人間ではありません。借金を帳消しにしましょう。娘さんをいただければ、貸したものはご破算にしますよ。」

金貸しは、何のためらいもなく言いました。

実は、金貸しはずっと前から商人の娘のことが好きだったのです。かなり歳の差があるにもかかわらず、一度申し込んだことがありました。しかし断られたのです。父も娘もこの二度目の求婚を喜ぶわけがありません。それに、返すお金がなかったものですから、商人は自尊心を傷つけられました。彼にできることと言ったら、せいぜい支払いの期限を少し延ばしてもらうくらいでした。

数日後、金貸しがまた姿を現しました。娘に愛想顔を向けると、こう言いました。

「どうだろう。ちょっと面白い賭けをしないか。お父さんには今借金を返すお金がない。でもこの賭けで助かるかもしれない。この空の袋に石を二個入れる。一つは白、もう一つは黒。袋に手を入れて石を一つ取ってごらん。石が黒なら、私と一緒にになる。そしてお父さんの借金は帳消し。石が白なら、結婚も借金も帳消し。どっち道、お父さんにとっては好都合。いいか、もしこの賭けをしないというなら、お父さんはただでは済まされないぞ。牢屋入り間違いなしだ。」

娘には、そのほかの方法がありません。しぶしぶ賭けをすることにしました。金貸しと娘は外に出ました。商人の庭には白と黒の小さな石が沢山敷かれていました。金貸しは石を二つ拾うと袋の中に入れました。

「さあ、一つ取って。」金貸しが言いました。

娘は意を決して手を入れましたが、うかつにも手から石を落としてしまいました。石はころころと転がるとほかの石の間にもぐりこんでしまいました。

「あら、あら！すみません。何てそそっかしいんでしょう！石の色を確かめる間もなかったわ。」娘はしゃがんで白い石を拾いました。

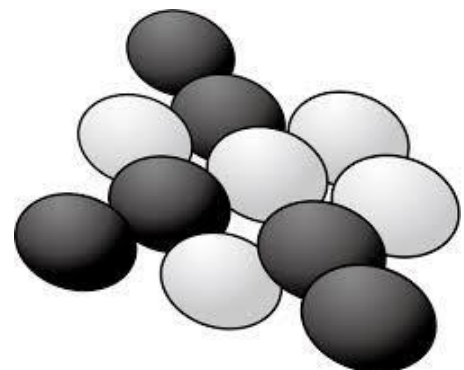
本当は、足元の石はどれも似ていて、どれが落とした石なのかわかりません。

金貸しは顔をまっかにして声を荒げました。

「そんなわけはない！黒だろう！」

娘も声を大にしました。

「随分自信がおありですね。袋の中を調べれば、どっちの石が



残っているかわかるでしょう。私の取ったのはその反対の色のはずですわ。」

もちろん金貸しは、娘が取った石は黒、とわかっていました。黒い石をわざと二つ袋に入れておいたのです。でもそのことを白状するわけにはいきません。やむなく袋の中の石は黒で、娘が取った石は白だった、と認めざるを得ませんでした。

「あの娘なかなかやりおるな。」

言った手前、金貸しは、娘と一緒にするのはあきらめ、商人の借金も帳消しにしました。(Kudos)