

## THE BOOK OF HOUGHTS.

Chester was feeling more tired than usual after a hard day at the office. He had joined the company only two years before. He had come straight from university then, but now he was a junior manager in one of the biggest companies in Singapore. It was an important position to have and meant lots of extra work.

He could understand the jealousy that some of the other workers might feel against the 'new boy', as they still called him. He had risen quickly in the company. Many of them, however, had been there for years doing the same jobs. He could understand how bad feeling towards him might lie hidden behind their smiles.

But it didn't make life any easier.

He needed people whose advice he could trust when he had to make difficult decisions. He had to be sure that the bad feelings of the other workers didn't get in the way of the important business decisions he had to make. He knew he would never become a manager unless he could be sure of people.

Then there was Dorothy.

Chester was fairly sure of his own good looks. He was dark and slim and dressed smartly, but with an eye to fashion. He was a confident speaker and believed himself to be a sociable and effective junior manager.

But when it came to Dorothy his judgement disappeared. Dorothy was a bright girl who had just joined the company, straight from university. He was attracted at once by her intelligent eyes, her shy, pretty face and her soft, round figure.

Ah, Dorothy!

Take today, for example. He had been given some new figures to check and he had asked Dorothy to read some of the details to him while he took notes. It was not until she had left that he realised that he had not written notes at all. Instead he had written Dorothy's name several times. He was too embarrassed to ask Dorothy for the details again, so he had to look them up in the office of old Mr Shaw.

Mr Shaw was known for always being in a bad mood and he was no different this time. He didn't like having to stay late to check figures for some junior manager. He didn't like it at all.

Chester hated it when he made mistakes. It didn't look good. But it didn't happen often.

He decided he would walk home instead of taking the train. It was late in the evening but he felt he needed the walk to clear his thoughts after a busy day. Anyway, it would be a little punishment for being so stupid earlier on. He decided that he would eat at the shopping centre near his home. He liked the Chinese food there.

As he walked towards his favourite Chinese restaurant, he saw that the lights were still on in an old antique shop. He had often thought of looking into this shop because he liked shops that sold old things. He stopped and looked. There were boxes full of old books piled outside the shop. On the shop window was a notice. It read: Sorry, shop closed today. Open

again tomorrow.

He bent down to look at the books. He saw all the usual old books: school books, cookery books and other books with dirty, yellowing pages that were of no value to him. There was one small, old book, however, that he noticed at once. It looked much older than the rest of the books. He picked it up.

'Take it!' said a voice behind him. Chester turned to see a man of about eighty years old. The man had opened the shop door and was carrying another box full of old books. 'These have all been around for years. My nephew is taking over the business and I don't want to leave him with all this rubbish. Nobody wants to buy any of it, so take what you want - go on, help yourself!'

'Thanks,' said Chester as he put the old book into his jacket pocket and went on to the Chinese restaurant.

Chester sat at his table drinking a beer. He had been looking forward to his chicken and rice. When it arrived, he found that the chicken had not been cooked properly. It was pink inside. He decided to complain and called the waiter.

'Sir?' asked the waiter.

Chester noticed that the waiter was new to the place.

'I'm not eating this,' Chester told him. 'The chicken is pink inside — it hasn't been cooked properly.'

'It's rare chicken, sir,' the waiter said. 'Many of our customers prefer its finer taste.'

Chester looked straight at the waiter. He thought the waiter was not showing him enough respect.

'Really?' answered Chester.

'It's very popular, sir,' said the waiter.

'And I suppose the illness they caught from eating undercooked chicken was popular with them too, eh?' said Chester. Other people in the restaurant could hear. He was annoyed.

The waiter said nothing but his face turned red.

'Please take this chicken back,' Chester told the waiter, 'and give me a piece that has been cooked all the way through.'

'Certainly, sir,' said the waiter as he took the food and went back to the kitchen.

While Chester was waiting for his meal to return he remembered the little book in his pocket. He thought he would have a look at it while he was waiting. He took it out of his pocket and examined it.

It was small enough to fit easily into his pocket and was covered with old, fine leather. He had to clean off some of the dirt in order to read the title on the cover. At first the title seemed to be in another language with strange letters and shapes, but as he looked they seemed to change into English. He closed his eyes tightly and opened them again. He was mistaken, of course. He must have been. When he looked again the title of the book was

there. It was still dirty but it was clearly written in English. It read: The Book of Thoughts.

It didn't say who wrote the book.

Chester thought it must be one of those old books which offered advice about life. He felt disappointed.

He tried to open the book but it had an old metal lock which stopped him. Then suddenly the book seemed to open quite naturally at the middle pages. It was almost as if it wanted him to read it.

What he saw when he looked surprised him. The pages had nothing written on them and they were clean and white, not at all like the yellowed pages one would expect to find in a book this old. Did all the pages have no writing on them?

Just then the waiter returned with Chester's chicken and rice and placed it before him.

'Thank you,' said Chester.

'My pleasure, sir,' answered the waiter with a smile.

Chester happened to look at the opened book. It now had writing on the pages which only a moment before had been clean and white. The writing said:

*He wouldn't look so pleased with himself if he knew what I had put on to his chicken while I was in the kitchen. That will teach him to make me look silly.*

Chester couldn't believe what he saw. Was this what the waiter was thinking?

'Anything else, sir?' asked the waiter politely.

'Er. . . no, thank you,' said Chester.

As the waiter walked off the writing disappeared. Chester looked at his meal. He didn't feel hungry any more. And he could hardly complain to the manager about the waiter. Not without telling them about the book. Who would believe him?

Chester left the chicken and rice alone, paid his bill and went. He did not leave the waiter a tip.

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When Chester got home he felt exhausted. He took out the book and looked inside it once more. The pages were now all white and clear again. Perhaps it had all been a result of his tiredness. He had been thinking too much about work — and about Dorothy. That must be it. There was no other possible explanation: he was simply too tired to think straight. He went to bed and slept almost at once.

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The train was less crowded than usual the following morning. He was lucky enough to find a seat for his short journey. He liked to watch people as they all sat or stood with faces that gave no sign of what they were thinking. Everybody avoided looking at another person in the eye -that might cause trouble.

Chester relaxed in his seat. He had decided that the experience of the night before was best forgotten. Who ever heard of a book that read thoughts? The whole idea was crazy!

Then he remembered that he still had the book in his pocket. He ought to throw it away

in the next rubbish bin. Yes, that's what he would do. Get rid of the stupid thing.

He noticed that the woman who sat opposite was an attractive, smartly dressed middle-aged lady. Her eyes looked down and her face showed nothing of her thoughts. Chester wondered what she was thinking.

Should he look at the book?

Perhaps just a little look would be fun. Where was the harm in it?

He reached for the book in his pocket. He took it out.

'Go on,' he said to himself, 'you might as well try out the book. Just for a laugh. Do it!'

He opened the book and almost at once words in clear black letters appeared on the white pages. The words read:

*I've given the best years of my life to him. Bank managers have married their secretaries before now. He must decide today — leave that awful wife and marry me or I'll shoot him and myself dead.*

Chester saw that the woman's soft handbag had something in it that looked hard. Could it be a gun? He quickly shut the book and looked away.

Next he saw a tough-looking man wearing a T-shirt, showing his powerful arms, what was he thinking?

Chester opened the book. It read:

*I like chicken better than pork. Fried chicken is the best. Followed by chocolate ice cream — my favourite. Mum's a great cook — I love you, Mum.*

Chester couldn't help smiling at the man. The man saw him and gave him a dangerous look. Just then the train reached Chester's station.

Time to get off the train.

He closed the book and put it back into his pocket. As he walked the short distance to his office his mind turned from the book to Dorothy. He had been thinking of asking her out to dinner.

'I'll do it today,' he thought. 'But what if she hasn't thought about me in that way? Maybe she isn't as attracted to me as I am to her?'

For a moment his heart felt heavy.

'Hey, come on, Chester — she's not blind. She's sure to be interested — after all, you're a good-looking guy and you are a junior manager.'

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Chester walked into his office. His secretary was already busy typing.

'Any messages, Miss Han?' he asked her.

'Yes, sir,' said Miss Han, 'from the Manager. He says he can't go to the meeting today about the Eastern business. He wants you to take over right away.'

Yes!

This was the kind of opportunity he'd been waiting for. He would show them all just how good he was. This was an important piece of business. If he could make sure that

everything went well he would get noticed. He would be an obvious choice for the next manager's job. If he became a manager he would be the youngest manager in the business!

And Dorothy would like that, wouldn't she? What woman wouldn't?

He thought of her soft figure in his arms. Her voice was whispering his name softly, *Oh, Chester. . . Chester. . .*

Ah, Dorothy!

'No problem,' he told Miss Han. 'Tell the others I'll be there to prepare for the meeting in half an hour.'

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When he met the others, Chester was confident and did his job well. He made sure that everybody knew what to do. The meeting that afternoon was sure to be a success. If, of course, the figures he had were all correct.

Just then he noticed a little smile on the face of Mr Shaw.

'What's the old man got to smile about?' thought Chester. 'He never smiles — why is he smiling now?'

Then he remembered his little book.

He took it out of his pocket and hid it behind some papers. He pretended to be looking at his notes and thought of Mr Shaw. The words appeared immediately:

*I'll teach that young fool a lesson. I've got some figures he doesn't know about hidden in my office. I've been working on this longer than he has. When he can't come up with the right figures he'll look stupid. Then I'll produce them and save the day. He'll look like a boy trying to do a man's job. He needs to learn some respect for experienced professionals like me.*

Chester felt a cold sweat on the back of his neck.

'So the old man really does dislike me, after all!'

Chester wondered what all the others thought about him but had no time to consult his book.

'Thanks everybody — see you all this afternoon,' Chester told them all. 'Enjoy your lunch.'

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While Mr Shaw was eating his sandwiches in the park, as he always did, Chester spent his lunch hour looking for the missing figures in Mr Shaw's office. Shaw was old-fashioned and preferred to use paper rather than recording things on a computer. It was a simple matter to copy the figures then leave Shaw's copies where he had found them -in a box in a cupboard. Chester felt almost disappointed. This was too easy!

Chester had missed his lunch but it had been worth it. His little book was turning out to be most useful.

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The meeting that afternoon was a great success. He had all the figures he needed. The

Eastern company people were happy and the papers were signed. Chester's future looked good. And as for Shaw. . . well, Chester could tell from his red face that he was angry because his little plan had gone wrong.

Chester made himself a promise: he would make sure that Shaw's future would not be good. Not if he could help it.

Chester did not like to lose.

After the meeting there would be just enough time to call in on Dorothy. Perhaps she would like to congratulate him over a drink.

When he got to her desk he found that she was away on a training course. She would be back the next day.

Just my bad luck, thought Chester. -

Ah, well; for the time being he could find somebody else to share this happy time with. But how and who with?

*Squash!* It was his favourite game. Why not arrange a game with Kim, his younger brother? Kim was a salesman. He had not gone to college but he had, like Chester, moved to the city. Chester always beat Kim at squash. He liked playing with Kim. He would telephone him as soon as he got home and see if a game could be arranged for that very night.

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'Yeah . . . mmm ... I see.'

Chester was in his apartment speaking on his mobile telephone. As he spoke he held the telephone more tightly than usual. He was listening to Kim. Kim was telling him that he had already promised to take his girlfriend to the cinema. As he spoke, Chester tried out the book to see if it would work over the telephone.

It did. It read:

*I hate it when Chester and I play squash - he always wants to beat me. But he's always wanted to be a winner, at home, at school — it never stops, even when he has a career of his own. He never thinks of me, but then he never was much of a brother. He can do without his game this time. I'm staying home to watch television.*

'OK, Kim,' said Chester. 'Enjoy the film. Yes . . . goodbye.'

Chester had never realised that his brother felt like that towards him. It came as a shock. He spent the evening watching television and drinking wine with a takeaway meal.

At least, he thought, he would see Dorothy tomorrow.

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The next morning Chester was sitting on his train to work. He was wondering whether he should look at The Book of Thoughts again when he noticed a photograph of the attractive middle-aged woman he had seen the day before. It appeared on the front page of a newspaper held open by the person sitting opposite him. Her picture was next to that of an

older man. The headline read: TWO DIE IN LOVERS' SHOOTING.

He didn't have to read any more. It was obvious that the book had correctly read the woman's mind the day before and that she had carried out her plan. But it was too late to do anything now.

Anyway, it was none of his business.

Chester didn't feel like looking at the book for the rest of the journey. However, he did start to think more about the book. Why, he wondered, had he not told anyone else about it?

The truth was that he could hardly believe in it himself. If he started telling others about an amazing book that could read thoughts they would think he was crazy. And what harm might it do to his career? In any case, he did not know whether it would work for other people. Perhaps the book only worked for him.

'Best leave the book alone for now,' thought Chester. 'Yes, that would be best.'

But the book still sat in his pocket as he walked off the train.

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The first part of the morning was brilliant. The Manager was very happy indeed with the way Chester had arranged the meeting with the Eastern company. It had been a great success. He received congratulations from all the people at the office. Many fine words were said to him about his bright future. Chester felt very pleased with himself.

Then he thought of his book.

"What were they all *really* thinking about him? He wanted to know who he could trust and who he couldn't. He couldn't trust Shaw, he knew that. But, surely, there were not many like him. 'After all,' thought Chester, 'I am young, good-looking, cheerful, successful - and I'm one of the rising stars of the company. I must be one of the most popular guys here!'

But he wasn't.

In fact, the book told him so every time he looked at it. At first he thought it was only the older people who were jealous of his success. But it was the young ones, too. All of them. They thought he was clever but believed himself better than they were: good-looking but without any feelings. Some even thought he might be dishonest. Y They hated him.

Chester had a lonely lunch at a cafe near the park. As he sat at his table, drinking strong coffee, he took out the book and looked at its cover. He read it: The Book of Thoughts.

He opened it. There was nothing there. Not a word. He wondered why it didn't show his own thoughts. Maybe it was because he already knew them. Maybe.

But what if he asked it to show him his deepest thoughts, the ones he didn't realise he was thinking? Would it do that? Should he ask it?

The idea frightened him. If thoughts were hidden, perhaps there was a good reason for it. Yet he still wanted to look. It was almost too much for him.

'I won't do it!' he told himself. 'The last time I looked in the book it told me things I wish I hadn't found out. No, I won't do it! ... Not yet.'

The cafe was becoming crowded so Chester walked back to the office.

Back to Dorothy.

She would be back from her training course by now. He would see her and ask her to dinner. He was certain that she would not be like the other people in the office.

His darling Dorothy.

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When Chester got back to the office he saw Dorothy. She was talking to old Shaw. But Dorothy was nice to everybody. She was that kind of person. He called her over and she smiled to him. Even Shaw smiled.

Chester took her to a quieter part of the office and asked. Dorothy said yes, she would love to go to dinner with him. Her intelligent eyes were shining in her lovely face. Chester watched as her soft, round figure walked back to her desk.

Dorothy, at least, liked him. He could be sure of her.

Darling Dorothy!

But he would have just one quick look in the book to make sure.

He reached into his pocket. The book was not there. He felt alarmed. He quickly went back to his office. He searched all his pockets and his briefcase, even his desk drawers, though he knew he hadn't put the book in any of them. It was no use. The Book of Thoughts was gone.

Chester remembered the crowds as he left the cafe. Had somebody taken the book out of his pocket? Things don't just disappear by themselves.

Do they?

All kinds of thoughts crowded through his mind. But the least expected and perhaps the most welcome thought was the feeling that a heavy weight had been taken away from him. He went back to try and see Dorothy again. She was talking to old Shaw - again. She saw Chester and waved to him.

At least, he thought, he still had Dorothy.

He had his career and he had Dorothy. None of the other people mattered. He could trust Dorothy. Of course he could. He was almost sure of it.

**Task. Answer the following questions.**

1. What was Chester's occupation?
2. How did his colleagues feel about him?
3. What did Chester look like?
4. What were his feelings towards Dorothy?
5. How did he feel in her presence?



6. Where did he find the book?
7. Why was the old man giving away old books for free?
8. What was wrong with his dinner?
9. How did the waiter behave?
10. What was amazing about the book?
11. What did the first writing say and how did it change his day?
12. What sort of book was it?
13. Did he have any fun reading the middle-aged lady's thoughts?
14. Why did he smile at the man with powerful hands? Was it dangerous?
15. What was the message from the manager? Did it upset Chester?
16. Why was Mr Shaw smiling? Was it typical of him?
17. How did Chester avoid getting into trouble?
18. How did the meeting in the afternoon go?
19. Who was Chester planning to share his happy time after work with?
20. Why did his brother Kim refuse to play squash?
21. Why was Chester shocked?
22. How did he learn that the book was reading people's minds correctly?
23. Why did Chester leave the book alone? Why didn't he share his information?
24. What did Chester think of himself?
25. Why was he not popular/ hated by so many people?
26. Did Dorothy show any interest in Chester?
27. Was Chester sure how to behave with Dorothy?
28. What happened to the book?