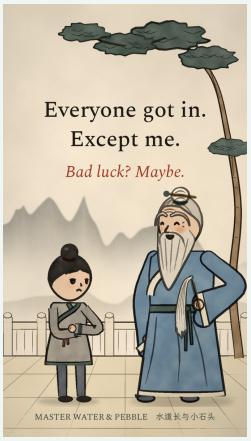
A STORY TO BRING INTO YOUR LIFE

Maybe.

A lost horse. A broken leg. A story that refuses to end where we expect.

FREE STORY & PRACTICE COMPANION



The old man and the horse

Pebble had watched everyone else receive the answer they wanted. His answer was no. By the time he reached Master Water, he had already decided what it meant: everyone else was moving forward, and he had been left behind.

Master Water asked him to listen to a story.

An old man lived near the frontier. One day, his horse wandered away into the territory beyond the border. His neighbours came to offer sympathy. Surely this was a misfortune.

The old man wondered how they could already know that it would not lead to something fortunate.

Several months passed. Then the horse returned, bringing a fine horse with it. This time, the neighbours came to congratulate the family. The loss had become a gain.

Again, the old man was cautious. How could they know that good fortune would not lead to trouble?

His son loved riding. One day he fell from a horse and broke his thigh. The neighbours returned to comfort the family. Once more, the old man left the final judgment open.

The story continues on the next page.

THE STORY, CONTINUED

Maybe.

A year later, war reached the frontier. The able-bodied men took up their bows to fight, and many died. Because the son could not walk properly, he was spared the fighting. Father and son survived together.

Pebble began to see why the story had not ended when the horse disappeared. Each event had looked complete to the neighbours. Each time, something happened next.

Perhaps being left out could turn out well for him, too. Master Water's answer was still: maybe.

The story offered no promise that every disappointment would become a gift. Pebble still had a real disappointment to face. But he did not yet have to turn it into a verdict on the rest of his life.

WHERE THIS STORY BEGINS

The frontier horse story appears in the Huainanzi, chapter 18 (人間訓). The reversals of good and bad fortune also resonate with Daodejing 58. The story itself is not from the Daodejing.

OUR RETELLING

Master Water, Pebble, the rejection frame and the closing reflection are our additions. "Maybe" is our shorthand, not a literal quotation from the ancient text. The written retelling describes the fine horse of the source; the short film simplifies this to a wild horse.

Read Huainanzi 18 · Chinese text

Read Daodejing 58

SOMETHING TO KEEP

A disappointment can be real without being a final verdict on your life.

MAYBE. / PERSONAL REFLECTION

Let the story meet your life.

A few quiet minutes. Choose what feels useful; leave any question you need to.

01 · LEAVE THE ENDING OPEN

The neighbours treated each change as the end of the story. At which moment did you want to do the same? What did the next event change?

02 · SEPARATE THE EVENT FROM THE VERDICT

Choose a manageable disappointment. What happened, in one sentence? In a second sentence, write what you have decided it means about you or your future. Which parts are still unknown?

03 · CHOOSE WHAT IS YOURS TO DO

Without promising yourself a happy ending, what small, useful response is available now? It might be asking for information, making another attempt, or giving yourself time.

ONE SMALL PRACTICE · TWO SENTENCES. A LITTLE SPACE.

On a note, write “What happened:” and “The meaning I added:”. Complete each once. Underneath, write one next step that does not depend on knowing the ending.

COME BACK TO IT

Return to your note in a few days. What do you know now that you did not know then? What is still open? You do not have to find a silver lining.