



Name: _____

Date: _____

A Fair Price

Once, in Burma, a poor man was travelling. He stopped under a tree to eat. He had brought his food with him. He had some rice and a few vegetables. That was all. Nearby, a woman kept a food stall. She sold fried fish there. She watched as the poor man ate and she watched him closely. When he was finished, she called to him.

“Give me a silver coin for the fried fish,” she said. The poor man was quite surprised. “There’s some mistake. I never came near your stall. I have never taken any fish from you. I have never eaten fish from you. I don’t owe you anything.” “You thief! Everyone can see what you did. You ate your meal where you could smell my fried fish. You enjoyed its smell. Without that smell, your meal would have been tasteless. You have to pay me.”

“I will not do so. I didn’t eat any fish. I don’t owe you anything.” said the man. She kept shouting at him. Soon a crowd gathered. Most of them felt sorry for the poor man. Yet they had to agree with the woman, too. The wind had been blowing towards the man. It has carried the smell of fried fish to him. Maybe he had enjoyed it. Maybe it had made his poor meal taste better. Maybe the woman was right. Should he pay?

The man and the woman could not agree, so they went to the princess of the land. People said she was very wise. “Hear our stories. Tell us who is right,” they said. The princess listened. Then she spoke. “Both of you are right, but he did enjoy its smell, so he has to pay the price.”

“Let him hold a silver coin up to the light. Let the woman take the shadow that it makes. For if the price of fried fish is a silver coin, the price of its smell has to be a coin’s shadow. That is fair.” Now, the quarrel ended.