

Idiom by Lon Yan

寢食難安

qin3 shi2 nan2 an1

The vendor of a Tai Po flat is suing the purchaser for the disappearance of 50 pairs of her beloved shoes, which were left in the flat inadvertently when the vendor moved out and the new owner took possession of the premises.

The woman said her domestic helper had failed to take the shoes as instructed. She discovered the mistake when she returned from visiting relatives in Australia. She tried to contact the new owner to recover the shoes to no avail. She now seeks HK\$300,000 in damages.

She said many of the shoes have sentimental value, and included the pair she wore at her wedding. She was so distraught for losing the collection that she was depressed and “寢食難安” (qin3 shi2 nan2 an1).

“寢” (qin3) is “sleep,” “to lie down,” “食”

(shi2) “to eat,” “food,” “難” (nan2) “difficult,” “problem” and “安” (an1) “quiet,” “peaceful,” “calm.” Literally, “寢食難安” (qin3 shi2 nan2 an1) “cannot rest or eat in peace.”

Worrying has physical symptoms, the most notable of which are loss of appetite and insomnia. “寢食難安” (qin3 shi2 nan2 an1) describes these symptoms, so figuratively, it means “extremely worried and troubled.” When someone is “寢食難安” (qin3 shi2 nan2 an1), he or she is troubled by deep worries.

Another idiom that also describes the symptom of a troubled heart is “茶飯不思” (cha2 fan4 bu4 si1) – literally “no thought for tea or rice,” that is, “having no appetite.” The idiom, meaning “melancholic and suffering,” is often used to describe people with a broken heart.

Terms containing the character “安” (an1) include:

安全 (an1 quan2) – safe; secure; security

安慰 (an1 wei4) – to comfort; to console

安排 (an1 pai2) – to arrange

安排 (an1 pai2) – to be relieved; to have peace of mind