

ENGLISH

CHAPTER 2: A THEF'S STORY



A THE THEIF'S STORY

~Summary~

-by Ruskin Bond

Hari Singh Approaches Anil

Hari Singh approached Anil while he was watching a wrestling match, as he seemed to be an easy target to him. Hari used some flattering words to gain Anil's confidence and soon they started conversing. After a while, when Anil started to walk off, Hari followed him with his most appealing smile. He expressed his wish to work for Anil. But Anil bluntly expressed his inability to pay Hari. Hari questioned Anil if he could feed him. Anil agreed to feed Hari only if he knew how to cook. Hari said that he knew how to cook but this was a lie.

Anil Brings Hari to his Room

Anil took Hari to his room over Jumna Sweet Shop and let him occupy the balcony to sleep. Anil gave that night's meal to a stray dog because the meal cooked by Hari was terrible. Anil had realised that Hari didn't know how to cook. He asked Hari to go off to sleep, but Hari hung around, giving his most appealing smile. Anil patted Hari's head and told him that he would teach him how to cook.

Anil Teaches Hari to Read and Write

Anil taught Hari to write his name and promised to teach him how to write whole sentences and to add numbers eventually. Hari was happy and grateful for this as he knew that he could achieve anything he wanted once he knew how to read and write like an educated man. He liked working for Anil. He started making tea in the morning and buying the day's supplies later. He used to make a profit of about a rupee on buying the day's supplies but knew that Anil didn't mind.

Hari had Gained Anil's Trust

One evening Anil came back with a bundle of currency notes he had got from selling a book he had written to a publisher. He kept the money under the mattress and slept peacefully. Hari had been working for Anil for almost a month and he had gained Anil's trust. Hari saw the opportunity to rob Anil. It was not an easy task as he knew that Anil will be sad about the loss of money. He

brushed away his thoughts and decided to execute the robbery the same night, as Anil would've otherwise wasted the money on his friends.

Hari Robbed Anil

Hari considered the situation and crawled up to the bed when Anil was asleep. He slid his hand under the mattress and drew the money out quietly. He rushed out of the room and began to run on the road. He had secured the money with the string of his pyjama. He was heading towards the railway station to catch 10.30 express to Lucknow as planned. He was elated when he counted the money on his way.

Hari didn't Board the Train

Hari reached the station just when the train was about to pick up speed. He could have managed to get into one of the carriages but something unexplainable stopped him. He was left behind on the station. He decided to leave the station and thought while walking through the bazaar about how would Anil feel when he would come to know about the theft. Hari had realised by then that he could not only cook the meals or go to the market to buy daily supplies, but he had also lost the chance to learn how to read and write. Due to these thoughts and his feeling of guilt, he decided to go back to Anil, if only for the sake of learning how to read and write.

Hari Kept the Money Back

Hari hurried towards the room. He opened the door cautiously so as not to wake Anil up. He quickly took out the currency notes which were damp because of the rain. He crept up to the bed and placed the notes under the mattress. After that, he went off to sleep in the balcony.

Anil Reacted Normally in the Morning

Hari woke up late in the morning. He found that Anil had already prepared tea. Anil gave a fifty rupee note to Hari, telling him that he had earned some money by selling a book to a publisher and now he would pay him regularly. Hari was motivated but he could make out that Anil knew everything though he didn't say anything to him about it.

Conclusion of The Thief's Story

In the chapter – The Thief's Story focuses on human values and relationships which are significant in our lives and those values have the power to change an individual.

NCERT SOLUTION

Questions (Page No. 8)

(READ AND FIND OUT)

Question 1: Who does 'I' refer to in this story?

Answer: In the story, 'I' refers to the narrator of the story Hari Singh, who was a fifteen-year-old experienced thief.

Question 2: What is he "a fairly successful hand" at?

Answer: He is "a fairly successful hand" at stealing and robbing people. By this he meant that he was an experienced thief who was very swift and clean in his work while robbing people without getting caught.

Question 3: What does he get from Anil in return for his work?

Answer: When Hari approached Anil for work, Anil told him clearly that he could not pay him for it. So, he asked Hari to cook so that he could feed him and stay with him. But when he found out that the young boy didn't know how to cook, he taught him to cook and how to write his name. Anil also promised to teach him to write whole sentences and calculate numbers. Besides, Anil also gave money to Hari to buy the daily supplies, and the latter would make a rupee profit a day from it.

Questions (Page No. 10)

(READ AND FIND OUT)

Question 1: How does the thief think Anil will react to the theft?

Answer: Hari, the thief, thought that on discovering his theft, Anil would be filled with sadness not because of the loss of money, but for losing the trust he had in him.

Question 2: What does he say about the different reactions of people when they are robbed?

Answer: In his short career as a thief, Hari's experience had made him aware of the different reactions of people when they were robbed. According to him, a greedy man showed fear; a rich man exhibited anger and a poor man showed acceptance.

Question 3: Does Anil realise that he has been robbed?

Answer: Yes, Anil realised that he had been robbed by Hari. He probably came to know of it from the damp notes which got wet due to rain the previous night. However, he didn't express anything and gave a fifty rupee note to Hari, and promised to pay him regularly.

Questions (Page No. 13)

(THINK ABOUT IT)

Question 1: What are Hari Singh's reactions to the prospect of receiving an education? Do they change over time? (Hint: Compare, for example, the thought: "I knew that once I could write like an educated man there would be no limit to what I could achieve" with these later thoughts: "Whole sentences, I knew, could one day bring me more than a few hundred rupees. It was a simple matter to steal — and sometimes just as simple to be caught. But to be a really big man, a clever and respected man, was something else.") What makes him return to Anil?

Answer: Hari was grateful to Anil who taught him how to write his name. He was excited to learn that Anil would teach him to write whole sentences too. He understood that being an educated man would add to his abilities, and help him to achieve a high social status in life. However, when he stole money and left Anil's house, he realised that being educated was a more fulfilling experience, and that stealing was a crime, and that he might soon get caught. He visualised the respect, reputation and possibilities that he would be able to achieve if he became educated. Hence, he was feeling guilty for cheating a noble man who gave him food and shelter. In addition, his urge to receive education also compelled him to return to Anil's house.

Question 2: Why does not Anil hand the thief over to the police? Do you think most people would have done so? In what ways is Anil different from such employers?

Answer: Unlike others, Anil did not call the police and hand over Hari on theft charges. He was well aware of the theft from the damp notes but he did not thrash him or even mention it in front of Hari. He was happy that Hari had realised his mistake and understood the importance of education in life.

In today's world, it is difficult to find people like Anil. Most people would not react in the same manner as he did. He was very patient and considerate towards Hari as he wanted him to become an educated man and lead his life respectfully.

Anil was different from other such employers because he was very understanding and compassionate by nature. When Hari returned with the money, it gave him the hope that Hari wanted to amend his ways and grow up to become a noble and literate man.

Questions (Page No. 13)

(TALK ABOUT IT)

Question 1: Do you think people like Anil and Hari Singh are found only in fiction, or are there such people in real life?

Answer: In the real world, people like Anil and Hari Singh rarely exist and are mostly found in fiction only. However, there may be an exception sometimes when we may come across people like Anil. From the story, we know that Anil was a kind-hearted and considerate person who was deeply concerned about Hari's education and future. When Hari stole Anil's money, his conscience pricked him and he had a change of mind, and realised the importance of education for his future. Hence, finding such kind of imaginary characters is a rare possibility in today's world.

Question 2: Do you think it a significant detail in the story that Anil is a struggling writer? Does this explain his behaviour in any way?

Answer: Yes, it is obvious that a significant detail in the story shows Anil was a struggling writer. His lifestyle was simple with irregular income, and he always spent money as per his capabilities. He made money sporadically. He would borrow one week, lend the next. He kept worrying about his next cheque, but as soon as it arrived he would go out and celebrate with his friends. Hari observed that Anil was unable to pay him a salary because he did not have a regular source of income. However, Hari felt that although Anil earned less, he never ill-treated him and was quite considerate towards him.

Question 3: Have you met anyone like Hari Singh? Can you think and imagine the circumstances that can turn a fifteen-year-old boy into a thief?

Answer: No, I haven't met anyone like Hari Singh but such kind of people do exist in the world. Many a time, a fifteen-year-old boy may be forced under unavoidable circumstances to become a robber. Mostly people commit crime to feed themselves or their families, or sometimes to satisfy their urge or addiction. It may also be to maintain their health or to fulfil their demands to lead a luxurious life and so on and so forth.

Question 4: Where is the story set? (You can get clues from the names of the persons and places mentioned in it.) Which language or languages are spoken in these places? Do you think the characters in the story spoke to each other in English?

Answer: The story is set near Lucknow somewhere in Uttar Pradesh. We understand this from the story when it mentions a railway station for an Express train to Lucknow. The presence of sweet shops, mandis and bazaars also indicate it to be a small and simple town. We can assume that characters in the story were not speaking to each other in English but probably in Hindi language.