

Lesson 2:

The Thief's Story

Introduction

Ruskin Bond's 'The Thief's Story' is more than a thief's story. The story deals with basic human values and relationships. It is easier for a thief to rob a greedy man. It is difficult even for a thief to rob a careless and honest person. Hari Singh did steal Anil's money but he couldn't run away with it. He had no friends because he regarded them to be trouble than help. The only person he really knew was the man he had robbed. Moreover, Anil was ready to educate Hari Singh. The thief's conscience pricked him. He came back to Anil and crept to his bed. He slipped the money under the mattress from where he had stolen it a few hours ago.

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Hari Singh was a young boy of fifteen. But he was a thief and a cheat. At a wrestling match, he came across Anil. He won Anil's confidence and came to his house as a servant. Anil was a writer and did not earn much. So, Hari Singh agreed to work for him only for food. Hari Singh did not know how to cook. The first meal which he cooked for Anil was so bad that he threw it to the dogs. But Hari's appealing smile made Anil give up his decision to turn him out.

Hari Singh did odd jobs for Anil. In the morning he made tea and then brought the day's supplies from the market. Often, he made a profit of a rupee a day out of these purchases. Anil had no regular income. He earned something by writing articles and stories for magazines. But one day Anil came home with a bundle of notes. He told Hari that he had earned six hundred rupees by selling one of his books. Hari's mouth watered at the sight of money. He decided to steal that money. Anil kept the bundle under his mattress and went to sleep.

Now Hari Singh went into the room and silently took the money under the mattress. He went to the railway station to catch the train to Lucknow. But he missed the train and walked in the bazaars. Soon it started raining and Hari was drenched completely.

Then Hari Singh remembered Anil. He imagined how sad Anil would be on finding the money stolen. Hari remembered that Anil used to teach him. He thought that without the education he would remain a thief.

But education might make him a big Mtn. So, he decided to return and replace the money. He reached home and silently put the money back under the mattress.

Main Points of the Story

- The narrator was a thief.
- Although only 15, he was experienced and successful in his work.
- Luck was against him and he thought of targeting Anil, a young man of 25 years.
- The narrator introduced himself to Anil as Hari Singh.
- He changed his name every month to escape arrest.
- Hari Singh wanted to work for Anil but Anil had no money to pay him regularly.
- Anil had no regular income and used to write for magazines.
- Anil asked if he could cook, and Hari Singh lied that he knew how to cook.
- Hari Singh cooked the food so terribly that it had to be thrown away to the stray dogs.
- Anil asked him to go away but the narrator didn't leave his company.
- Later on, Anil softened and told him that he would teach Hari Singh how to cook.
- He also taught Hari Singh to write his name and promised to teach him to write whole sentences and to add numbers.
- It was quite pleasant for Hari Singh to work for Anil, and he made a rupee a day from buying the day's supplies.
- One evening, Anil came home with a small bundle of notes as he had just sold a book to a publisher.
- Hari Singh saw Anil tuck the money under the mattress.
- Hari crept up to the bed, slid his hand under the mattress and took the money out.
- Anil sighed in sleep and Hari Singh startled and quickly left the room.
- When the narrator (the thief) was on the road, he counted the notes: 600 rupees in fifties.
- With that money, he could live like a rich Arab for a week or two.
- He could easily jump into the Lucknow Express but hesitated and remained standing at the platform.
- He had no friends to go and the only person he knew was Anil whom he had robbed a few hours ago.
- It was a chilly night and a light drizzle added to his problem.
- Hari Singh had forgotten about his education in the excitement of theft and realised that education could bring him more money than a few hundred rupees.
- Hari Singh went back to the room and put the wet notes under the mattress from where he had stolen it?
- Next morning, Anil stretched out his hand towards the narrator (Hari Singh) holding a fifty-rupee note.
- Anil told that he had made some money and he would pay Hari Singh regularly.

- Actually, Anil knew everything about the theft but neither his lips nor his eyes showed anything.

Short Answer Questions (30-40 Words)

1. Why did Hari Singh approach Anil?

Ans. Hari Singh was a thief who had not much luck in his work recently. So, he approached Anil with the intention of robbing him, as he seemed to be an easygoing and simple man. According to Hari, winning Anil's confidence was an easy task.

2. Anil walked away. I followed casually'. Why do you think the narrator followed Anil?

Ans. The narrator's purpose of robbing Anil had not yet been served. He followed Anil to gain his trust and look for an opportunity that may help him give shape to his plans.

3. Was Hari Singh successful in robbing Anil? Was Anil the only one who was robbed or did Hari also rob himself of something?

Ans. Yes, Hari Singh was successful in robbing Anil. But Anil was not the only one who was robbed at that time. Hari had robbed himself as well. He had lost the chance of receiving education and being literate. He had robbed Anil monetarily but he had robbed himself of the chance for a better and brighter future, which was much more valuable.

4. What did Anil and Hari agree upon to be the mode of payment?

Ans. When Anil stated his inability to pay Hari, Anil questioned Hari if he could feed Hari. Hari realised that he had misjudged his target and moulded the situation for his benefit. Anil then agreed to feed him if he knew how to cook.

Long Answer Questions (100-150 Words)

1. Money can't make a man as much as education can. Elucidate the statement.

Ans: The statement stands true in almost all the aspects of life. Money may buy us all the luxuries and fulfill our needs but it cannot buy us knowledge, civilized thinking, skills and abilities to achieve our dreams. Education lays the platform for all to act upon our goals according to our abilities. Education enables us to keep up with the fast moving world. It opens the door to opportunities we do not know even exist. Money, on the other hand, can assist us to a certain level. It can buy us a plan but education gives us the knowledge of its execution. Just as in the story 'A Thief's Story', Hari Singh prioritized the chance of being literate over a few hundred rupees; we must understand that education can help us to achieve whatever we desire.

2. Hari Singh didn't board the express and returned to Anil. Why did he return? On what values does this incidence put light on?

Ans. Hari Singh was a thief and he had stolen Anil's money. After the theft, he realised that he had robbed not only Anil but also himself of the chance of being literate and having a bright future. His conscience pricked him to think what all he could have got had he not done this. It was difficult for him to rob Anil but it was tougher for him not to back. He realised that he could not make tea, buy daily supplies and learn how to read and write then. His inner self did not agree to bypass this and forced him to return. Hari's return to Anil shows that despite indulging in criminal acts, he still had a practical and positive attitude towards life. It is the awakening of Hari's conscience and Anil's love and care that reformed Hari's character. It teaches us that love alone can change a person. Anil's understanding nature and care changed Hari's thinking to mend his ways for good.

Short Answer Questions [Unsolved]

1. What made Hari Singh go back to Anil's house?
2. Did Hari like working for Anil? Give reasons in support of your answer.
3. Why was it difficult for Hari to rob Anil?
4. State the events that took place on the night of the theft.

Long Answer Questions [Unsolved]

1. How was the morning after the night of the theft?
2. How do you think Anil may have come to know about the theft?