

Ch. 2 - The Thief's Story

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Text and explanation:

I was still a thief when I met Anil. And though only 15, I was an experienced and fairly successful hand. Anil was watching a wrestling match when I approached him. He was about 25 — a tall, lean fellow — and he looked easy-going, kind and simple enough for my purpose. I hadn't had much luck of late and thought I might be able to get into the young man's confidence. "You look a bit of a wrestler yourself," I said. A little flattery helps in making friends. "So do you," he replied, which put me off for a moment because at that time I was rather thin. "Well," I said modestly, "I do wrestle a bit." "What's your name?" "Hari Singh," I lied. I took a new name every month. That kept me ahead of the police and my former employers. After this introduction, Anil talked about the well-oiled wrestlers who were grunting, lifting and throwing each other about. I didn't have much to say. Anil walked away. I followed casually. "Hello again," he said. I gave him my most appealing smile. "I want to work for you," I said. "But I can't pay you."

Lean- thin

Flattery- excessive and insincere praise

Modestly- in an unassuming manner; without vanity or arrogance.

Employers- a person or organization that employs people.

Grunting- make a low, short guttural sound.

Appealing- attractive or interesting.



The story starts from the point where the two main characters of the story meet- Anil and the thief. The thief is the narrator of the story. The thief says that according to him, he was pretty good at stealing. Anil was watching a wrestling match when the thief approached him. Anil was

a tall, lean and an easy - going man of 25. The thief had not committed any theft in the past few days as he did not get a chance. He thought that Anil would be a good man to steal things from. So he thought about getting comfortable with him. Then the thief commented on Anil that he looks like a wrestler himself. He said that to win his confidence by flattering him. To this, Anil replied that even the thief looked like a wrestler which offended him as he was very thin at that time. The thief modestly replied that he did wrestle a bit sometimes. Anil asked his name and the narrator lied that his name was Hari Singh. The narrator used to change his name every month to escape the police and his ex-employers. Then they started talking about the well-oiled wrestlers whom they watched on the screen. The narrator did not have much to say as he did not know much about wrestling. As Anil was leaving, the narrator again approached him asking him that he wanted to work for him. The narrator approached him with the most appealing smile that he could. Anil told him that he won't be able to pay him for his work.

I thought that over for a minute. Perhaps I had misjudged my man. I asked, "Can you feed me?" "Can you cook?" "I can cook," I lied again. "If you can cook, then maybe I can feed you." He took me to his room over the Jumna Sweet Shop and told me I could sleep on the balcony. But the meal I cooked that night must have been terrible because Anil gave it to a stray dog and told me to be off. But I just hung around, smiling in my most appealing way, and he couldn't help laughing. Later, he patted me on the head and said never mind, he'd teach me to cook. He also taught me to write my name and said he would soon teach me to write whole sentences and to add numbers. I was grateful. I knew that once I could write like an educated man there would be no limit to what I could achieve. It was quite pleasant working for Anil. I made the tea in the morning and then would take my time buying the day's supplies, usually making a profit of about a rupee a day. I think he knew I made a little money this way but he did not seem to mind.

Misjudged- form a wrong opinion or conclusion about.

Balcony-a platform enclosed by a wall or balustrade on the outside of a building, with access from an upper-floor window or door.

Terrible- extremely bad or serious.

Patted- touch quickly and gently with the flat of the hand.

Pleasant- giving a sense of happy satisfaction or enjoyment.

Supplies- a stock or amount of something supplied or available for use.

Hari had not expected this reply and thought to himself that he had misjudged Anil as he had thought that Anil had a lot of money. The narrator then asked if he could feed him to which Anil instantly asked if Hari could cook. Hari lied again and said 'yes'. Anil replied that if Hari could cook, then he could feed him. Both of them went to Anil's room which was above the Jumna sweet shop.



Anil also told Hari that he could sleep in the balcony. The narrator said that the mean that he cooked must have been terrible as Anil had to give it away to a stray dog. Then he told Hari to go and sleep but Hari decided to stay for a while. Hari's smile was so appealing that Anil could not stop laughing looking at him. After some time, Anil patted on Hari's head and told him that he would teach him to cook. He also told him how to write his name and told him that he would soon teach him to write sentences and add numbers. Hari was grateful for what Anil had planned as he knew that there would be no limits to his work once he knew how to write. Hari enjoyed working for Anil. He used to make tea for him in the morning and then used to go out to buy groceries for the day. He would also keep 1 rupee in his pocket everyday from the money that Anil used to give him for daily groceries. Anil knew that he took a rupee everyday but he did not mind. He was fine with it.

Anil made money by fits and starts. 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. It seems he wrote for magazines — a queer way to make a living! One evening he came home with a small bundle of notes, saying he had just sold a book to a publisher. At night, I saw him tuck the money under the mattress. I had been working for Anil for almost a month and, apart from cheating on the shopping, had not done anything in my line of work. I had every opportunity for doing so. Anil had given me a key to the door, and I could come and go as I pleased. He was the most trusting person I had ever met. And that is why it was so difficult to rob him. It's easy to rob a greedy man because he can afford to be robbed, but it's difficult to rob a careless man — sometimes he doesn't even notice he's been robbed and that takes all the pleasure out of the work. Well, it's time I did some real work, I told myself; I'm out of practice. And if I don't take the money, he'll only waste it on his friends. After all, he doesn't even pay me.



Anil was asleep. A beam of moonlight stepped over the balcony and fell on the bed. I sat up on the floor, considering the situation. If I took the money, I could catch the 10.30 Express to Lucknow. Slipping out of the blanket, I crept up to the bed. Anil was sleeping peacefully. His face was clear and unlined; even I had more marks on my face, though mine were mostly scars. My hand slid under the mattress, searching for the notes. When I found them, I drew them out without a sound. Anil sighed in his sleep and turned on his side, towards me. I was startled and quickly crawled out of the room. When I was on the road, I began to run. I had the notes at my waist, held there by the string of my pyjamas. I slowed down to a walk and counted the notes: 600 rupees in fifties! I could live like an oil-rich Arab for a week or two.

Fits and Starts- not working on something consistently

Borrow- take and use (something belonging to someone else) with the intention of returning it.

Lend- grant to (someone) the use of (something) on the understanding that it will be returned.

Queer- strange; odd.

Bundle- a collection of things or quantity of material tied or wrapped up together.

Tuck- push, fold, or turn (the edges or ends of something, especially a garment or bedclothes) so as to hide or secure them.

Line of work- the principal activity in your life that you do to earn money

Beam- a ray or shaft of light.

Crept- move slowly and carefully in order to avoid being heard or noticed.

Drew- pull or drag

Sighed- emit a long, deep audible breath expressing sadness, relief, tiredness.

Startled- feeling or showing sudden shock or alarm.

Anil did not have any regular income as he used to earn money by doing different activities. He did not have any fixed job. The narrator says that Anil used to be worried about his paychecks all the time but as soon as he would receive a cheque, he would go out with friends and celebrate. The narrator thinks that he used to write for magazines. The narrator also thinks it to be a strange way to make money. Then suddenly one evening, Anil came home with some money and told Hari that he had just sold a book to a publisher. Before going to bed, Anil put the money under his mattress and Hari saw him putting the money there. Hari thought that he had been working for Anil for almost a month now and he had not cheated him apart from the 1 rupee that he used to take out daily. The narrator also thinks that he had every chance to steal as Anil had given him the key to his room as well and he could come and go whenever he wished to do so. Hari had been trusted upon by Hari the most. Hari had not been trusted upon by anyone else in his life. This was the only thing that was stopping Hari from stealing as Hari thought that it is way easy to rob a greedy man because he has the capability or the money to get robbed as he knows about what he has lost but for a careless man like Anil there was no use to steal as they sometimes don't even come to know that they have been robbed. Also, Hari feels that when someone doesn't come to know that he has been robbed, then there is no fun left in robbing him. Then Hari decided that he would start with some work. He had not robbed anyone for a long time. He also justified his act of stealing Anil's money by telling himself that if he didn't steal it then also Anil would waste it on his friends. He also thought that he had a right over the money as Anil didn't even pay him for the work he used to do.

Hari started his work when Anil was sleeping. There was a little bit light over Anil's bed because of the moonlight that was coming in from the window. Hari sat on the floor and planned that if he took the money he could leave the city by the 10:30 pm Lucknow Express train. Hari then crawled towards the bed and slipped his hand slowly inside the bed mattress. He looked at Anil who was sleeping peacefully without a single line on his face and Hari's face had so many scars on it. He realized that although he was much younger than Anil, he had such a bad appearance due to his wrong thinking. On the other hand, Anil was carefree and thought good for others because of which he had such a nice face. Hari then took out the notes without making any sound. Anil took a breath in his sleep and turned his side. He was directly facing Hari which scared him a bit and Hari quickly left the room. As soon as Hari left the room and was on the road, he started running and had kept the notes in his pyjamas. He had tied it with the string of pyjamas. Then after a while, Hari slowed down and counted the notes. He had 12 notes of 50 rupee each which made it 600 rupees. Then Hari thought to himself that with this much money he could live a luxurious life like an Arabian sheikh for at least two weeks.