

## Ch. 2 - The Thief's Story

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### Text and explanation:

When I reached the station I did not stop at the ticket office (I had never bought a ticket in my life) but dashed straight to the platform. The Lucknow Express was just moving out. The train had still to pick up speed and I should have been able to jump into one of the carriages, but I hesitated — for some reason, I can't explain — and I lost the chance to get away.



When the train had gone, I found myself standing alone on the deserted platform. I had no idea where to spend the night. I had no friends, believing that friends were more trouble than help. And I did not want to make anyone curious by staying at one of the small hotels near the station. The only person I knew really well was the man I had robbed. Leaving the station, I walked slowly through the bazaar. In my short career as a thief, I had made a study of men's faces when they had lost their goods. The greedy man showed fear; the rich man showed anger; the poor man showed acceptance. But I knew that Anil's face when he discovered the theft, would show only a touch of sadness. Not for the loss of money, but for the loss of trust. I found myself in the maidan and sat down on a bench. The night was chilly — it was early November — and a light drizzle added to my discomfort. Soon it was raining quite heavily. My shirt and pyjamas stuck to my skin, and a cold wind blew the rain across my face.

Dashed- Quickly ran towards something

Carriages- any of the separate sections of a train that carry passengers.

Hesitated- pause in indecision before saying or doing something.

Deserted- (of a place) empty of people.

Curious- eager to know or learn something.

Robbed- take property unlawfully from (a person or place) by force or threat of force.

Bazaar- market

Maidan- a park

Drizzle- light rain falling in very fine drops.

When Hari reached the station, he straight away went to the platform without buying a ticket as he had never bought a ticket in his life. He had always travelled without a ticket. When he reached the platform, the Lucknow Express in which he had to go was just leaving the platform. The train was still slow so he could have easily jumped and got on one of the carriages. But he did not do so. There was a bit of hesitation in him. Even he didn't understand why he had that hesitation inside him and because of that he could not board the train. After sometime when the

train had left, Hari found himself all alone at the empty platform. Hari did not know where would he spend the night. He did not have any friends whom he could go to as he used to think that friends were more of a trouble than being helpful. He did not even want to stay at any of the small hotels as that would attract attention. He knew only one person very well and he had robbed him as well. As Hari was walking through the bazaar after leaving the station he was thinking of his observations as a thief. In a short career span, he had realized that although everybody - from rich to poor shows different reactions to losing their goods but Anil would only be a little sad. That too would not be because he lost his money, but because he has lost trust that he had on Hari. He would be sad that he trusted someone so much and the person had betrayed him.

Hari was walking when he reached a park. He sat on a bench. As it was the month of November, the night was a bit chilly and then the drizzle added to the discomfort that Hari was going through. It started raining quite heavily and Hari's shirt and pyjamas stuck to his body. Cold wind was blowing across Hari's face.

I went back to the bazaar and sat down in the shelter of the clock tower. The clock showed midnight. I felt for the notes. They were damp from the rain. Anil's money. In the morning he would probably have given me two or three rupees to go to the cinema, but now I had it all. I couldn't cook his meals, run to the bazaar or learn to write whole sentences any more. I had forgotten about them in the excitement of the theft. 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. I should go back to Anil, I told myself, if only to learn to read and write. I hurried back to the room feeling very nervous, for it is much easier to steal something than to return it undetected. I opened the door quietly, then stood in the doorway, in clouded moonlight. Anil was still asleep. I crept to the head of the bed, and my hand came up with the notes. I felt his breath on my hand. I remained still for a minute. Then my hand found the edge of the mattress, and slipped under it with the notes. I awoke late next morning to find that Anil had already made the tea. He stretched out his hand towards me. There was a fifty-rupee note between his fingers. My heart sank. I thought I had been discovered. "I made some money yesterday," he explained. "Now you'll be paid regularly." My spirits rose. But when I took the note, I saw it was still wet from the night's rain. "Today we'll start writing sentences," he said. He knew. But neither his lips nor his eyes showed anything. I smiled at Anil in my most appealing way. And the smile came by itself, without any effort.

Shelter- a place giving temporary protection from bad weather or danger.

Clock Tower- a tower, typically forming part of a church or civic building, with a large clock at the top.

Midnight- twelve o'clock at night.

Damp- slightly wet.

Cinema- a theatre where films are shown for public entertainment.

Hurried- done in a hurry; rushed.

Undetected- not detected or discovered.

Clouded- make or become less clear or transparent.

Then Hari went back towards the bazaar and sat under the shelter of the clock tower to escape getting wet. It was 12 o'clock by the clock tower. Hari checked the notes and they were wet. Then again Hari started thinking that it was Anil's money and if he had not stolen it, Anil would have surely given him 2-3 rupees to go for a movie. But now as he had stolen it, he had it all. Now he won't be able to make tea or do groceries for Anil anymore nor would he be able to learn to write whole sentences ever. He had not realize that he would be loosing all these in the excitement of stealing the money. He knew that if he could learn to read and write, he could earn much more money than these few hundred rupees and that too honestly. He knew that it was very easy to steal something from someone but sometimes it was that easy to get caught as well. He knew that if he learnt to read and write, he could surely become a big and respected man one day. Then Hari told himself that he should go back if he wanted to learn to read and write and also if he wanted to be a big man one day.

Hari went back to Anil's room and was very nervous because he knew that it was much more difficult to return stolen things without being caught than actually stealing it. Hari went to the hallway and stood there as the moonlight was still falling over the bed. Anil was still asleep. Hari went near the head of the bed and took out the notes. As he was going near the mattress, his hand could feel Anil's breath on his hand. Hari became still for a moment, found the edge of the mattress and finally slipped the notes under it. The next morning, Hari woke up a little late and Anil had already made the tea by then. Anil extended his hand towards Hari and had a 50 rupee note in his hand. Hari thought he had been caught. Then suddenly Anil explained that he had made some money the day before, so he was giving him 50 rupees. He also said that he would be paying Hari regularly. Hari was really happy but when he took the note in his hand, he saw that it was still wet from last night. He also told Hari that that day he would teach him how to write complete sentences. Hari realized that Anil had come to know that he had stolen money and kept it back. But the great thing that happened was that he did not let it show on his face or his words. Hari again smiled at Anil in his most appealing way and Anil's smile also came to his face without any effort.

## Questions and Answers

Q1. 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?

Ans. Hari Singh feels that education can make him earn a lot of money in an honest way. His prospect on receiving an education does not change over time. He feels that he can earn much more if he gets education. He returns to Anil because Anil trusts him, feeds him, treats him well and even teaches him.

Q2. 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?

Ans. Anil did not hand over the thief to the police maybe because he knew that Hari Singh had

realized his mistake. He was feeling guilty for what he had done and wanted to mend his ways. This was the reason why he had come back and put the money back to its place. Anil wanted to give him a chance to become a better person.

No, I don't think that anybody in today's world would have done so because to do so, a person needs to have a lot of patience and compassion which is missing in most of the people today. In today's world a thief is considered a criminal even if he realizes his mistake. It takes a lot of courage to trust someone who has broken your trust once. Although I feel that if a person realizes his mistake he must be given another chance to win back your trust.

Q3. Who does 'I' refer to in this story?

Ans. In this story, "I" refers to the thief who introduces himself as Hari Singh.

Q4. What is he "a fairly successful hand" at?

Ans. He was a "fairly successful hand" at robbing and duping people of their money.

Q5. What does he get from Anil in return for his work?

Ans. When he asks Anil that he wants to work for him, Anil clearly says that he will; not be able to pay him. They mutually decide that if the thief would be able to cook food for him, then Anil would feed him. But soon, Anil comes to know that he can not cook. So Anil tells Hari, the thief that he would teach him to cook food, teach him to write his name and full sentences and also to add numbers. Apart from this, Hari also used to steal one rupee from the grocery money everyday.

Q6. How does the thief think Anil will react to the theft?

Ans. The thief thought that on discovering that he had been robbed, Anil would definitely be sad but he would be sad because of the loss of trust and not because of the loss of money.

Q7. What does he say about the different reactions of people when they are robbed?

Ans. The thief says that according to his experience, upon being robbed the greedy man showed fear, the rich man showed anger and the poor man showed acceptance towards whatever had happened with him.

Q8. Does Anil realise that he has been robbed?

Ans. Yes, probably Anil knew that he had been robbed because all the notes were wet and damp from last night. He still did not say anything to the thief and gave him 50 rupees and told him that from now on, Anil will be paying him money as salary every month.

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