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The Thief's Story

INTRODUCTION

The story is about a 15 year old thief who changes his name every month to stay ahead of the police and old employers. This time he keeps his name Hari Singh. The other person in the story is a 25 year old writer named Anil. The thief meets Anil and asks him if he can work for him. Anil gives him work in his house. One day Hari Singh steals Anil's money and runs away. But the kindness and love of Anil make him come back and return the money. The writer shows how the reformation of a criminal is best achieved through love and understanding rather than punishment.

SUMMARY

The narrator (Hari Singh) was a thief. Although only fifteen, he was experienced and successful in his work. He thought of targeting Anil, a young man of 25 years. Anil was a tall, lean and thin fellow. He looked easy-going, kind and simple enough for the purpose of a thief like the narrator. He wanted to win Anil's confidence. The narrator introduced himself to Anil as Hari Singh. The narrator took a new name every month. He did so to avoid arrest from the police and his former employers.

Anil was a writer and did not earn much. Anil asked Hari Singh, the thief if he could cook. Hari Singh lied that he could. So, Hari Singh agreed to work for him only for food. Hari Singh did not know 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.

Hari Singh was grateful that, at least, Anil had given him the basic education. He knew that once he could write like an educated man, there would be no limit to what he could achieve. He 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. The day he got the money he would go out and celebrate. One evening Anil came home with a bundle of notes. He told Hari that he had earned six hundred rupees by selling one of his books.

Anil was asleep. Hari Singh thought over the situation. If he stole the money, he could catch the 10:30 Express to Lucknow. He crept up to the bed and slid his hand under the mattress and drew the notes out. He counted the notes: 600 rupees in fifties. With that money, he could live like a rich Arab for a week or two. He went to the railway station to catch the train to Lucknow but hesitated and remained standing at the platform. He had no friends to go to and the only person he knew was Anil whom he had robbed a few hours ago. He came to the 'maidan' and sat on a bench. The night was chilly and it had a light drizzle. Hari Singh was drenched and the notes became damp.

He reached home and silently put the money back under the mattress. Next morning, Anil gave Hari a 50 rupee note. The note was still wet. Hari thought that his crime had been discovered. But Anil told him that he had earned something. Now he would pay Hari Singh regularly. He also told that he would teach Hari Singh how to write sentences. Actually, Anil knew everything about the theft but neither his lips nor his eyes showed anything.

Question Banks

"You look a bit of a wrestler yourself". I said A little flattery helps in making friends.

(a) Who was the speaker? Who was he trying to flatter?

Hari Singh was the speaker and he was trying to flatter Anil.

(b) Why did the speaker want to be friends with the listener?

The speaker wanted to be friends with the listener because he wanted to rob him after gaining his trust.

(c) Find the antonym of 'criticism' in the extract.

The antonym is 'flattery'.

(d) What is the opposite of 'friends'?

'Enemies' is its opposite.

2. "Well, it's time I did some real work, I told myself; I'm out of practice."

(a) What 'real work' is the speaker talking about?

(b) Why does the speaker say 'I'm out of practice'?

(c) Give a synonym of 'practice'.

(d) What part of speech is the word 'real' in the extract?

(a) The 'real work' in the extract refers to stealing.

- (b) The speaker says so because he is a thief and he has not robbed anyone recently.
- (c) Here, habit is a synonym of 'practice'.
- (d) It is an adjective

3. "He knew. But neither his lips nor his eyes showed anything".

(a) Who is 'he' in the extract? What did he know?

'He' refers to Anil in the extract. He knew about the theft of his money.

(b) Why did he not show anything?

Anil did not show anything because he understood and Hari's return gave him the hope of a change in him.

(d) Which word in the extract means the same as 'reveal'?

'Showed' means the same as 'reveal'.

(e) What is the antonym of 'showed'?

'Hide' is its antonym.

4. "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."

(a) Why was the speaker standing alone on the platform?

(b) Why did he not have any friends?

(c) Which word in the extract is an antonym of the word 'crowded'?

(d) What does 'deserted' mean?

(a) The speaker was standing alone on the platform because a train had just left.

(b) The speaker did not have any friends because he thought that friends were more trouble than help.

(c) The word is 'deserted'.

(d) It means empty.

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

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.

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

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 turned the situation for his benefit. Anil then agreed to feed him if he knew how to cook.

3. Did Hari like working for Anil? Give reasons in support of your answer.

Yes, Hari liked working for Anil. He was happy to carry on the chores for him and was grateful for the education he was receiving. He used to make profit of about a rupee a day as well, which was a decent amount besides being fed.

4. What are the different reactions of the people when they are robbed?

According to Hari Singh, different people react differently on being robbed. The greedy man displays fear, the rich man shows anger, and the poor man shows acceptance. However, a trusting man like Anil would be sad due to the loss of trust.

5. Why was it difficult for Hari Singh to rob Anil?

It was difficult to rob Anil because he was the most trusting person Hari Singh had ever met. According to Hari Singh, it's easy to rob a greedy man because he can afford to be robbed but it's difficult to rob a careless man because he doesn't even notice that he's been robbed and that takes all the pleasure out of the work.

6. State the events that took place on the night of the theft.

The night of robbery was quite eventful for Hari Singh. After stealing Anil's money and leaving Anil's house, Hari went to the railway station but didn't board the train to Lucknow. He walked slowly through the bazaar as he did not know anyone who would provide him shelter except Anil, for he didn't have any friends. He was forced to take shelter under the clock tower later when it started raining heavily. That is where he realised the importance of education and decided to go back to Anil.

7. Had Anil really forgiven Hari Singh?

Support your answer with evidence. Yes, Anil had forgiven Hari Singh. It is evident because Anil handed over to Hari a fifty rupee note as soon as Hari woke up. Though he knew that Hari had robbed the money at first but his subsequent actions gave him hope of change in Hari's character.