Chapter 19: The Thief's Story

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Exercise 19.1 — Read and Find Out (Page 8)

Q1 Who does 'I' refer to in this story?

SOLUTION

The narrator 'I' is the young thief who tells the story in the first person.

He introduces himself to Anil as "Hari Singh", but this is a false name — he says, "'Hari Singh,' I lied. I took a new name every month."

So 'I' refers to a fifteen-year-old thief, known in the story by the assumed name Hari Singh.

Answer: 'I' refers to the young thief who narrates the story, who calls himself Hari Singh (a false name).

Q2 What is he "a fairly successful hand" at?

SOLUTION

He is a thief. He tells us, "I WAS still a thief when I met Anil. And though only 15, I was an experienced and fairly successful hand."

So he is a fairly successful hand at stealing / robbing people.

Answer: He is a fairly successful hand at stealing — an experienced thief, though only 15.

Q3 What does he get from Anil in return for his work?

SOLUTION

Anil could not pay him money, but he agreed to feed him. Anil says, "If you can cook, then may be I can feed you."

Anil also gave him a place to sleep — the balcony of his room over the Jumna Sweet Shop — and, more importantly, taught him to cook and to read and write. Anil "taught me to write my name and said he would soon teach me to write whole sentences and to add numbers."

The boy also made a small profit of about a rupee a day by cheating on the shopping.

Answer: In return, Anil feeds him, gives him a place to sleep, and teaches him to cook, read and write.

Exercise 19.2 — Read and Find Out (Page 10)

Q1 How does the thief think Anil will react to the theft?

SOLUTION

The thief believes Anil will not react with fear or anger like other men, but only with sadness.

He says, "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."

So he expects Anil to be sad about the loss of trust rather than the loss of money.

Answer: He thinks Anil will show only a touch of sadness — for the loss of trust, not the loss of money.

Q2 What does he say about the different reactions of people when they are robbed?

SOLUTION

From studying men's faces when they lost their goods, the thief has noticed that different types of people react differently.

He says, "The greedy man showed fear; the rich man showed anger; the poor man showed acceptance."

Anil, however, is different — his face would show only a touch of sadness at the loss of trust.

Answer: The greedy man showed fear, the rich man showed anger, and the poor man showed acceptance.

Q3 Does Anil realise that he has been robbed?

SOLUTION

Yes, Anil realises he has been robbed, though he never says so directly.

When he pays the boy the next morning with a fifty-rupee note, the boy notices, "But when I took the note, I saw it was still wet from the night's rain." The note was wet because it was part of the stolen money that had got damp in the rain and been returned.

The narrator concludes, "He knew. But neither his lips nor his eyes showed

anything." Anil quietly forgives the boy and promises to start teaching him whole sentences.

Answer: Yes — Anil realises it (the returned note is wet from the rain), but he says nothing and forgives the boy.

Exercise 19.3 — Think about it (Page 13)

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?

SOLUTION

At first, Hari Singh sees education mainly as a tool for cleverer, bigger theft. When Anil begins teaching him, he thinks, "I knew that once I could write like an educated man there would be no limit to what I could achieve." He values it for selfish, material gain.

Yes, his reactions change over time. After the theft, standing alone in the cold with the stolen notes, he realises that education offers something greater than quick money. He reflects, "Whole sentences, I knew, could one day bring me more than a few hundred rupees... to be a really big man, a clever and respected man, was something else."

He now understands that being educated can make him respected and honest, not just rich by stealing. This realisation — the desire "to learn to read and write" and become respectable — is what makes him return to Anil and quietly slip the money back under the mattress.

Answer: At first he wants education for cleverer theft; later he sees it as the path to being a respected, honest man — and that is why he returns to Anil to keep learning.

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?

SOLUTION

Anil does not hand the thief over to the police because he is a kind, forgiving and understanding person who wants to reform the boy rather than punish him. He realises the boy has returned the money on his own and has begun to change, so he chooses to give him another chance.

Instead of confronting or scolding him, Anil simply pays him properly and says, "Today we'll start writing sentences." He continues to trust and teach him.

Most people would probably have handed such a thief over to the police, or at least dismissed and punished him.

Anil is different from such employers because he treats his servant with warmth and trust rather than suspicion. He is easy-going, generous and caring — he feeds, shelters and educates the boy — and he believes in giving the boy a chance to become an honest, respected man rather than treating him as a criminal.

Answer: Because Anil is kind and forgiving and wants to reform the boy, not punish him; most people would have called the police, but Anil trusts, teaches and gives him another chance.