

talk
to
me!

LET'S TALK EMPOWERMENT. LET'S TALK ENGLISH

Footprints without Feet 2

The Thief's Story

1. Watch and listen to the story

Click on the link below to watch a video of the story being read. Note the pronunciations of the words and read along using the subtitles.

[\(83\) The Thief's Story - YouTube](#)

2. Summary

The Thief's Story by Ruskin Bond is a story about the transformational power of goodness and trust between human beings. The narrator is a 15 year old boy, who calls himself Hari Singh and is a habitual and experienced thief. His life changes course when he meets Anil, a 25 year old freelance writer.

He befriends Anil with the intention of robbing him. Anil offers to employ him as a cook. Hari waits for a suitable opportunity to rob him. However, Anil is very kind to him, and teaches him to cook and also to read and write. This gives Hari the hope that, one day, he will be able to earn money honestly.

One night, Hari finds an opportunity to rob Anil while he is asleep and runs away with the money that Anil had tucked under his mattress. But, as he is leaving the city, he finds himself standing at a crossroad between his old life of stealing, and running, and the possibility of a new life of stability and respect. He chooses the right path and returns to Anil's house and to his new life. He slips the money back under the mattress while Anil is still asleep.

Hari has been transformed by Anil's goodness, and the prospect of a better, more respectable life.

3. Vocabulary

1. **Betray his trust** – do something harmful to a person who has believed in you
Hari could not **betray his teacher's trust** by cheating during the exam.
2. **Experienced** – having skill or knowledge because you have done something many times
He was an **experienced** teacher and knew how to handle the unruly class.
3. **Fairly successful hand** – to be fairly successful at any particular action
He is a **fairly successful hand** at competitive exams.
4. **Wrestling** – a sport in which two people fight and try to throw each other to the ground
Babita Kumari Phogat won a gold medal at the Commonwealth Games **wrestling** championship in 2014.
5. **Approached** – came near to someone or something
I **approached** the cricketer and asked for his autograph.
6. **Lean** – thin; to rest against something
The tall, **lean** man was **leaning** against the wall.
7. **Easy-going** – relaxed and tolerant attitude or manner
His **easy-going** nature often made people take advantage of him.
8. **Confidence** – trust
I have complete **confidence** in her, and am sure that she will be perfect for the job.
9. **Flattery** – insincere praise
She believed that **flattery** of her teacher would get her good marks in the class tests.
10. **Put me off** – to stop or repel one from something
The sight of blood **put me off** my food for the rest of the day.

11. **Modestly** – without boasting, in a humble way, decently dressed
Though he topped the exams, he dealt with his success very **modestly** and did not boast about it.
Women in Islamic countries have to dress **modestly**.
12. **Former** – earlier
In my **former** office, we all ate lunch together.
13. **Employers** – persons who give work or employ other people
All his former **employers** spoke very highly of him.
14. **Introduction** – telling someone your name, or another person's name at the first meeting; an occasion when something is put to use or brought to a place for the first time
Please make the **introductions**, as Sunita does not know everyone here.
With the **introduction** of Metro in Delhi, the traffic situation has improved quite a lot.
15. **Grunting** – making low guttural sounds
The workers were **grunting** as they lifted the heavy crates and carried them upstairs.
16. **Casually** – informally, in a relaxed way
We are allowed to dress **casually** for office on Saturdays.
17. **Appealing** – attractive
The company's offer of a high salary, plus a car, was very **appealing**.
18. **Misjudged** – to form an opinion or idea about someone or something that is unfair or wrong
I thought that he was going to lie to the teacher, but I **misjudged** him.
19. **Grateful** – showing or expressing thanks
I am **grateful** to Mr. Sharma for helping me out with a loan.
20. **Fits and starts** – something that keeps happening and then stopping again
He is lazy and cannot keep a regular job; he works in **fits and starts**.

21. **Celebrate** – to take part in special enjoyable activities in order to show that a particular occasion is important
We always **celebrate** our daughter's birthday by feeding the poor in the locality.
22. **Queer** – strange
It is **queer** that she did not visit her parents even once when she was in town.
23. **Publisher** – a person or a company that produces and sells books, magazines, newspapers, software, etc.
I am writing to the **publisher** of Anita Desai's new book to send me a copy.
24. **Tuck** – to put something into a safe and convenient place, usually under or into something else.
She **tucked** the note into the book and forgot all about it.
When I was young, my mother used to **tuck** me into bed every night.
25. **Mattress** – the part of bed made of a strong cloth cover and filled with cotton or foam; it makes the bed comfortable to lie on
I have a back problem and so I need to lie on a firm **mattress**.
26. **Cheating** – behaving in a dishonest way in order to get what you want
Anyone caught **cheating** during the exam will not be allowed to sit for the rest of the exams.
27. **Opportunity** – an occasion or situation that makes it possible to do something that you want to do or have to do
Please do not miss the **opportunity** to watch Deepika Padukone in her new movie.
28. **Trusting** – always believing that other people are good or honest and will not harm or deceive you
The child gave a warm, **trusting** smile and went away with the strange man.
29. **Pleasure** – enjoyment, happiness, or satisfaction
His visits gave great **pleasure** to his grandparents.
30. **Out of practice** – not good at doing something because of not having done it for some time
I cannot play the piano properly as I am **out of practice**.

31. **Beam** – a ray or line of light, a long piece of wood used to support weight of a ceiling
The **beam** of the torch did not reach too far.
A heavy wooden **beam** will be used to support the roof.
32. **Considering** – spending time thinking about a possibility or making a decision
We are **considering** selling this car and buying a new car.
33. **Situation** – a set of things that are happening, or the conditions that exist at a particular time and place; location
The economic **situation** in our country now is very bad.
The beach is an excellent **situation** for our party.
34. **Slipping** – going somewhere or putting something somewhere quickly so that you are not noticed; sliding, stumbling, falling
I was **slipping** quietly out of the room, when my mother called me.
The mountain path was very wet because of the rain, so we all kept **slipping**.
35. **Crept** – moved slowly, quietly, carefully, usually in order to avoid being noticed
He **crept** around the room searching for the keys to the cupboard.
36. **Peacefully** – calmly
I hope that the problem with China can be solved **peacefully**.
37. **Unlined** – showing no sign of worry or anxiety
He is surrounded by a number of problems but his face stays **unlined**.
Though she was over seventy years old her face was still **unlined**.
38. **Scars** – marks on the skin from cuts and wounds
The **scars** on his face were removed with plastic surgery.
39. **Drew them out** – took something out
I **drew** the money out of my bank account.
40. **Sighed** – to breathe out slowly, noisily, expressing tiredness, sadness, pleasure, etc.
When my father saw my report card, he just **sighed** and shook his head.

41. **Startled** – surprised and slightly frightened
He was **startled** when he saw so many strangers crowding into his room.
42. **Crawled** – to move forward on hands and knees, to creep out from hiding, to move very slowly
The baby **crawled** to the front room.
The traffic **crawled**, and the horns were so annoying.
The cat **crawled** out from under the bed when the dog went away.
43. **Oil-rich Arab** – this refers to Arabs who have made a lot of money by selling oil; 22 countries are considered to be part of the Arab League. All of them are not oil rich. Qatar, UAE, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia were considered the richest Arab countries before COVID-19 caused a sharp drop in oil prices.
He lived luxuriously, like an **oil-rich Arab**, in a five-star hotel.
44. **Dashed** – to go somewhere suddenly and quickly; ruined
She **dashed** into the house when she heard a loud clatter.
Arun's hopes of getting into the Army were **dashed** when he lost his leg in a terrible accident.
45. **Carriages** – a form of transport that has wheels, and is pulled by humans or animals; separate parts of a train in which the passengers sit
We still see a few horse drawn **carriages** in some parts of Delhi.
When the train picked up speed, the **carriages** swayed from side to side.
46. **Hesitated** – paused before you did or said something, often because you are not sure or you are nervous
She **hesitated** slightly before answering the teacher's question.
47. **Deserted** – empty, uninhabited, unoccupied
Homeless people often take shelter in the **deserted** house at the end of the road.
48. **Curious** – interested in learning about people or things around you
I did not want to make him **curious**; so I pretended as if nothing had happened.

49. **Acceptance** – the act of agreeing to an offer, plan or invitation; the act of accepting a difficult or unpleasant situation
There has been widespread **acceptance** of the garbage segregation scheme.
50. **Drizzle** – light rain with very small drops
I was hoping the **drizzle** would stop and the sun would shine again.
51. **Discomfort** – suffering or pain when you have been slightly hurt, or placed in an uncomfortable situation
She was in some **discomfort** after her foot was put in plaster.
We all experienced a lot of **discomfort** when we were driving to the mall, because there were too many people in the small car.
52. **Shelter** – to take protection from bad weather, danger, or attack
All the motorcyclists took **shelter** in the underpass during the storm.
53. **Probably** – used to mean that something is likely, but not certain
I will **probably** be able to catch the train if I hurry.
54. **Excitement** – a feeling of anticipation, pleasure, enthusiasm
His heart was pounding with **excitement** as he boarded the plane for his first flight.
55. **Respected** – admired by many people for your qualities or achievements
The Principal was highly **respected** by all the teachers of the school.
56. **Nervous** – worried and anxious
I was very **nervous** about the exam, but it went off well.
57. **Undetected** – not discovered
The theft remained **undetected**, as the owners of the house were away on a holiday.
58. **Stretched** – reached out, usually as far as possible
The monkey **stretched** out its hand and grabbed the food packet from my hand.
59. **Heart sank** – one's courage or hope fails, one is very disappointed
When it started raining just before the picnic, my **heart sank**.

60. **Spirits** – mood, feelings
Ever since she heard that the Indian team has lost the match, she has been in low **spirits**.
61. **Neither** – not either of two things or two people
Neither one of us is interested in going to mall.

4. Questions

Read and Find Out

1. Who is the 'I' in this story?
2. What is he "a fairly successful hand" at?
3. What does he get from Anil in return for his work?
4. What did Hari usually do to get people's confidence? Did it work when he approached Anil?
5. 'Perhaps I had misjudged my man' – In what context did Hari think so about Anil?
6. Is Hari a habitual liar as well as a thief? What does he lie about?
7. During the first few days in Anil's house what did Hari become grateful for?
8. 'I knew that once I could write like an educated man there would be no limit to what I could achieve' – Who is Hari saying this to and what do we make of him and his belief about himself?
9. 'Anil made money by fits and starts' – What does this tell you about the work Anil does?
10. 'He was the most trusting person I had ever met' – Why does Hari believe this of Anil?
11. Why did Hari find it difficult to rob Anil?
12. How does the thief think Anil will react to the theft?

13. What does he say about the different reactions of people when they are robbed?
14. Does Anil realise that he has been robbed?

Think about it

1. 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?
2. 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?

Talk about it

1. Do you think people like Anil and Hari Singh are found only in fiction, or are there such people in real life?
 2. Do you think it a significant detail in the story that Anil is a struggling writer? Does this explain his behaviour in any way?
 3. Have you met anyone like Hari Singh? Can you think and imagine the circumstances that can turn a fifteen-year-old boy into a thief?
 4. Where is the story set? (You can get clues from the names of the persons and places mentioned in it.) Which language or languages are spoken in these places? Do you think the characters in the story spoke to each other in English?
5. Suggested reading
- 'He Said It with Arsenic' by Ruskin Bond
 - 'Vanka' by Anton Chekhov
 - 'A Scandal in Bohemia' by Arthur Conan Doyle