

# The Thief's Story

Comprehensive Chapter Summary & Exam Revision Guide • Glen Tutorials

## About the Author: Ruskin Bond (b. 1934)

Ruskin Bond is an iconic Indian author of British descent who lives with his adopted family in Landour, Mussoorie, India. The Indian Council for Child Education has recognized his significant role in the growth of children's literature in India. He was awarded the prestigious **Sahitya Akademi Award** in 1992 for his published work '*Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra*', followed by the **Padmashri** in 1999 and the **Padmabhushan** in 2014.

## 1. Introduction to the Chapter

'**The Thief's Story**' is a deeply moving narrative that explores themes of trust, betrayal, friendship, and the transformative power of education and human kindness. The story revolves around two contrasting characters: a 15-year-old experienced thief who calls himself **Hari Singh**, and a 25-year-old struggles-oriented, large-hearted writer named **Anil**. Through their brief interaction, Ruskin Bond beautifully depicts how unconditional trust and empathy can reform even a hardened criminal, proving that love and education are far more powerful deterrents to crime than punishment.

## 2. Character Profiles

### A. Hari Singh (The Narrator)

- **Age & Profession:** A 15-year-old boy who is an exceptionally experienced and "**fairly successful hand**" at stealing.
- **Deceptive Nature:** He adopts a new pseudonym every month to remain **ahead of the police** and escape his former employers.
- **Shrewd Observer:** He knows how to flatter people to gain their confidence, describing it as a tool that "*helps in making friends.*"

### B. Anil

- **Age & Appearance:** A 25-year-old tall, lean, and easy-going young man with a kind and simple demeanor.
- **Livelihood:** He earns money "**by fits and starts**"—writing for magazines, borrowing one week and lending the next.

- **Nature:** Incredibly trusting, generous, and completely unbothered by petty losses or material wealth.

### 3. The First Meeting & The Bargain

Hari Singh approaches Anil while the latter is watching a wrestling match. Using calculated **flattery**, Hari remarks that Anil looks like a wrestler himself. Anil responds wittily, noting that Hari is quite thin too, which momentarily throws Hari off before he modestly concedes that he wrestles a bit.

When Hari expresses a desire to work for Anil, Anil honestly states, "**But I can't pay you.**" Hari pauses to reconsider his target, wondering if he has misjudged his man. He then shifts his approach, asking if Anil can feed him. Anil counters with a critical question: "**Can you cook?**" Hari lies, saying he can. This lie secures him shelter on Anil's balcony over the **Jumna Sweet Shop**.

#### Cause-and-Effect Relationship

**Cause:** Hari Singh lies about knowing how to cook.

**Effect:** The first meal he prepares turns out to be absolutely terrible. Anil ends up feeding it to a stray dog and tells Hari to leave. However, Hari's persistent, appealing smile melts Anil's heart, causing Anil to laugh and allow him to stay.

### 4. The Power of Education & Daily Life

Instead of throwing Hari out, Anil pats him on the head and promises to teach him how to cook. More importantly, Anil promises to teach Hari **how to write his name, write complete sentences, and add numbers**.

Hari recognizes the immense value of this gesture, noting that once he becomes educated, "**there would be no limit to what I could achieve.**" This marks a crucial shift from a criminal mindset to an aspirational one.

Their daily routine becomes quite pleasant. Hari makes tea in the morning and later goes out to buy the day's supplies. During shopping, Hari regularly cheats Anil by making a profit of **about a rupee a day**. Although Anil is likely aware of this petty theft, he chooses to overlook it, highlighting his generous and non-possessive character.

**Section Key Takeaway:** Anil's house is a space built entirely on trust. Hari enjoys complete freedom, holding a duplicate key to the door, making Anil "the most trusting person" Hari had ever encountered. This high level of trust paradoxically makes it far more difficult for Hari to rob him.

### 5. The Theft: A Conflict of Conscience

One evening, Anil arrives home with a small bundle of notes, having just sold a book to a publisher. At night, Hari watches Anil tuck the money safely under the mattress. Seeing this large sum, Hari tells

himself that it is time to do some **"real work,"** rationalizing that he is out of practice and that if he doesn't take the money, Anil will only waste it on his friends.

While Anil sleeps peacefully with a clear and **unlined face**, Hari creeps up to the bed, slides his hand under the mattress, and extracts the bundle of notes—**600 rupees in fifties**. He dashes out of the room and runs toward the railway station to catch the **10:30 Express to Lucknow**.

#### Common Student Mistake to Avoid

Many students assume Hari missed the train because it had already left the station. **This is incorrect.** The textbook explicitly states that the train was still moving slowly and picking up speed; Hari could have easily jumped into one of the carriages but actively **hesitated** due to an inner conflict of conscience.

## 6. The Turning Point on the Deserted Platform

As the train disappears into the distance, Hari finds himself completely alone on the deserted railway platform. He has no friends, believing that *"friends were more trouble than help,"* and he refuses to stay at a local hotel to avoid raising suspicion.

Walking slowly through the bazaar, Hari reflects on his career as a thief and his unique study of human faces when people lose their goods:

- The **greedy man** shows fear.
- The **rich man** shows anger.
- The **poor man** shows acceptance.

However, Hari realizes that when Anil discovers the theft, his face will show only a **touch of sadness**—**not for the loss of money, but for the loss of trust**.

## 7. The Return and Redemption

A sudden chilly November rain begins to pour. Sitting on a bench in a public ground (*maidan*), Hari's clothes stick to his skin, and the stolen currency notes become damp and soaked. In this miserable state, Hari realizes that if he runs away, he will lose the chance to learn how to write whole sentences. He recognizes that stealing can be simple, but becoming a **clever, respected, and big man** requires education.

Driven by his desire to read and write, Hari hurries back to Anil's room, his heart racing with nervousness. He quietly creeps back into the bedroom, slides his hand under the mattress, and replaces the damp notes exactly where he found them.

## 8. The Silent Climax

The next morning, Hari wakes up late to find that Anil has already prepared tea. Anil extends his hand, holding out a **fifty-rupee note**. Hari's heart sinks, thinking his theft has been discovered.

To his surprise, Anil happily announces, "**I made some money yesterday. Now you'll be paid regularly.**" As Hari takes the note, he notices it is **still damp** from the previous night's rain.

Anil clearly knows everything that happened, yet neither his lips nor his eyes reveal any anger or reproach. Instead, he smiles and says, "**Today we'll start writing sentences.**" Hari smiles back at Anil in his most appealing way—a smile that comes naturally and genuinely from within, without any calculated effort.

| Important Textbook Vocabulary | Contextual Meaning & Usage                                               |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Flattery</b>               | Insincere or excessive praise offered to gain a favor.                   |
| <b>By fits and starts</b>     | In short, irregular intervals; not continuous or steady.                 |
| <b>Unlined</b>                | Showing no signs of worry, anxiety, or age; peaceful.                    |
| <b>Heart sank</b>             | An idiom meaning to feel suddenly depressed, discouraged, or frightened. |
| <b>Spirits rose</b>           | An idiom meaning to become very hopeful, cheerful, and encouraged.       |

### Exam-Oriented High-Scoring Tips

- **Theme-Based Questions:** Emphasize that *human values and trust* are far more effective at reforming a criminal than police action or legal punishment.
- **The Character of Anil:** If asked about Anil's reaction, emphasize that his silence was more powerful than a lecture. By not exposing Hari, Anil gave him a dignified path to reform.
- **Symbolism of the Damp Note:** The wet fifty-rupee note symbolizes that Anil was completely aware of the crime but consciously chose forgiveness over confrontation.