

# Footprints Without Feet

## (Class X – NCERT)

### Chapter 2: The Thief's Story – Ruskin Bond

#### Detailed Summary (Expanded, Exam-Oriented)

The story "The Thief's Story" by Ruskin Bond is a touching tale about transformation, trust, and the power of education. It narrates the journey of a young thief named Hari Singh who experiences a moral awakening through the kindness and trust shown by Anil, a struggling writer.

Hari Singh is a 15-year-old experienced thief who has mastered the art of winning people's confidence before robbing them. He changes his name frequently to avoid being caught. One day, he sees Anil watching a wrestling match and decides to befriend him with the intention of robbing him later.

Hari Singh approaches Anil and asks if he can work for him. Anil tells him frankly that he cannot pay any regular salary as he is a struggling writer who earns money irregularly. However, Hari Singh insists on working for food, and Anil agrees, somewhat amused by the proposition.

Anil lives a simple, carefree life. He writes for magazines and makes money when his work is published. When he has money, he spends it freely on his friends. Hari Singh is assigned cooking duties, but his first attempt at making chapatis is disastrous. Instead of dismissing him, Anil patiently teaches him how to cook properly.

Over time, Anil also begins teaching Hari Singh how to read and write. He teaches him to write his own name and promises to teach him full sentences and arithmetic. For Hari Singh, who has never been educated, this opens up a whole new world of possibilities.

Hari Singh also does the daily shopping and makes a small profit of about a rupee each day by inflating the prices. Surprisingly, Anil knows about this petty theft but says nothing, which puzzles Hari Singh.

One evening, Anil comes home with a bundle of money - about 600 rupees - that he has earned from selling a book to a publisher. He counts the notes and casually puts them under his mattress before going to sleep. Hari Singh watches all this carefully.

That night, while Anil sleeps peacefully, Hari Singh steals the money and leaves the house. He walks through the deserted bazaar toward the railway station, planning to catch the Lucknow Express. With 600 rupees, he could live comfortably for months.

At the station, the train arrives, but Hari Singh hesitates. He stands on the platform as the train slowly begins to move, but he does not board it. The train leaves without him.

Standing alone in the darkness, Hari Singh experiences a profound internal conflict. He realizes that Anil was teaching him to read and write, skills that would enable him to earn 600-700 rupees per month honestly in the future. If he runs away with the stolen money now, he will always remain an uneducated thief.

Moreover, Hari Singh realizes that Anil's trust and kindness have touched something deep within him. Anil knew about the rupee he stole daily from shopping money but accepted it with a smile, perhaps hoping that Hari Singh would change over time.

Hari Singh makes a decision that changes his life. He walks back to Anil's room in the light rain and carefully puts the money back under the mattress exactly where it was. He then goes to his bed and sleeps.

The next morning, Anil wakes up and makes tea as usual. He gives Hari Singh a 50-rupee note, saying he made some money yesterday and will now pay him regularly. When Hari Singh takes the note, he notices it is still damp from the previous night's rain.

His heart sinks - Anil knows everything. The wet note proves that Anil knows Hari Singh took the money in the rain and brought it back. But Anil says nothing about the theft. He doesn't accuse, scold, or punish Hari Singh.

This silent forgiveness and continued trust affect Hari Singh more deeply than any punishment could have. Anil has given him a second chance without making him feel ashamed. Hari Singh smiles - a genuine smile full of hope and gratitude. He has been given a new beginning, and he resolves to learn, to change, and to become a better person.

## Central Themes

### 1. Transformation Through Trust

The story demonstrates how trust and kindness can reform a person more effectively than punishment. Anil's faith in Hari Singh inspires genuine change.

### 2. Education as Empowerment

Education is presented as a pathway to dignity and honest livelihood. The ability to read and write offers Hari Singh freedom from a life of crime.

### 3. The Power of Forgiveness

Anil's silent forgiveness, shown through the damp currency note, teaches a more powerful lesson than any confrontation would have.

### 4. Moral Conflict and Choice

Hari Singh's internal struggle at the railway station represents the universal human capacity for moral reflection and positive change.

### 5. Simple Goodness

Anil represents simple human goodness - not naive, but consciously choosing to trust and give chances, believing in human potential for change.

## Character Sketches

### 1. Hari Singh

A 15-year-old orphan and experienced thief who is clever and street-smart. Despite his criminal lifestyle, he retains the capacity for moral reflection. His decision to return the stolen money shows his inner goodness struggling against his circumstances. He is manipulative initially but becomes genuine after experiencing trust and kindness.

### 2. Anil

A 25-year-old struggling writer who lives a simple, carefree life. He is trusting, kind, and perceptive. Though he knows about Hari Singh's small thefts, he chooses to educate rather than punish. His generosity and faith in human nature make him an ideal mentor. He represents the transformative power of unconditional positive regard.

## Important Vocabulary (With Meanings)

- **Unlined** – without wrinkles, appearing young
- **Appealing** – attractive or interesting, pleading
- **Modestly** – in a limited or humble manner
- **Flattery** – excessive or insincere praise
- **Grunting** – making low, rough sounds
- **Wrestling** – a sport involving grappling with an opponent
- **Chap** – a man or boy, fellow
- **Jerky** – characterized by sudden starts and stops
- **Crawling** – moving slowly on hands and knees

## Exam-Ready Key Points

- Hari Singh is an experienced 15-year-old thief who changes his name frequently
- Anil is a struggling writer who cannot pay regular wages but offers education
- Hari Singh steals about a rupee daily from shopping money, which Anil knows but ignores
- Hari Singh steals 600 rupees but returns it after realizing education is more valuable
- The damp currency note proves Anil knows about the theft but chooses to forgive
- The story teaches that trust and education can reform better than punishment
- Hari Singh's smile at the end represents his genuine transformation and new beginning