

INFELICITOUS THIEF**Ankit Kumar Jha**

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Class: 10th

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The town of Saharsa had long fallen asleep. The streets lay silent beneath a silver moon; the windows were dark, and only the occasional chirping of crickets reminded the world that the night was still awake.

In one of those quiet houses of the town lived Professor Prabha Nanda, a respected Professor of Hindi, known for her discipline, refined manners and extraordinary command of language.

At precisely the same hour, another soul was awake.

His name was Ariman.

He wasn't a sort of thief who rushed into houses.

He considered haste a sign of poor upbringing.

Instead, he proffered patience- although his vision of patience usually involved making life unnecessarily difficult for himself.

He first tested the garden gate.

It squeaked.

He immediately froze.

Then he spent nearly five minutes gently pushing and pulling the gate until it opened without making another sound.

Satisfied with his achievement, he walked on his toes across the stone pathway; carefully avoiding dry leaves as though they were landmines.

A loss pebble rolled beneath his foot.

He caught it before it could make him fall.

A hanging wind chime begins to move.

He respectfully held it till the breeze passed.

A sleepy cat stared at him.

Ariman folded his hands before it in the hope that mutual respect would ensure silence.

The cat responded with a non-cholent yawn.

Instead of squeezing it through immediately, he slowly pushed it wider half an inch at a time - waiting after every moment to hear if anyone was awake.

"Nothing no" he muttered to himself self-assuredly.

He lifted a foot over the window and paused for a while.

Then he thrust the other foot in and paused again.

After a moment he closed the winnow gently behind him and paused once more.

The house was almost entirely dark.

"Perfect", he whispered.

"Everyone must be asleep" he whispered again internally.

With measured steps, he tiptoed into the adjoining room.

A faint glow escaped from beneath the shed of a small study lamp.

Every other light in the house was switched off to avoid disturbing the professor's seven years old daughter, who was sleeping peacefully on the bed nearby, hugging her stuffed rabbit.

Ariman turned his head almost absentmindedly.

Professor Prabha Nanda, deeply absorbed in her notes, raised her eyes at exactly the same moment.

For several long seconds, neither of them moved.

She adjusted her spectacles-while he pretended to be examining the ceiling.

She lowered her notebook.

He smiled awkwardly.

Only then did it occur to both of them; that an unfamiliar one was inside the room.

The professor broke the silence.

"My goodness!"

Then, instead of screaming, she fired with unmistakable disappointment.

"Young man" she said calmly, "has no responsible elder in your family ever taught you that one should knock before entering someone else's house?"

Ariman blinked in.

He had prepared himself for police, broomsticks and perhaps a flying slipper.

Nothing came out.

"I... I thought".

"You thought incorrectly".

She stood up.

"And one more thing", she said

"When addressing a lady - especially an educated one- you should stand straight, lower your voice, speak respectfully, avoid staring, never interrupt, and certainly not appear through the kitchen window after midnight".

Ariman immediately straightened his soul.

"Good".

"And what about apology?".

He folded his hands.

"No"

She corrected him.

"First say, good evening. Professor".

"Good evening, Professor".

"Now apologies".

"I sincerely apologies for entering without permission".

"Much better".

"And remember, respect is shown before words, not after them".

The unfortunate thief nodded so earnestly that he almost lost his balance.

Professor Prabha looked thoughtfully at her notes.

"Since you have interrupted my preparation, you will now compensate for it".

Ariman's heart sank and birds flew.

"You shall be my audience".

She took a dignified position beside the table.

He sat.

"My lecture tomorrow concerns the poetic devices used in the works of Suryakanta Tripathi 'Nirala', particularly upma (simile), anuprasa (alliteration), and atishayokti (hyperbole)."

She began.

"Respected Principal, honored colleagues, and dear students...".

Her voice filled the quiet room with scholarly confidence.

She explained how Upma creates vivid comparisons that illuminate emotion, how Anuprasa lends musical beauty through repeated sounds, and how Atishyokti magnifies feeling through deliberate exaggeration.

She illustrated each point with enthusiasm, pausing after every section.

"Well?"

Ariman, having understood very little, as it was difficult, so very difficult, clapped enthusiastically.

She frowned.

"You don't applaud after defining upma".

"I beg your pardon".

"What did you understand?"

He panicked over.

"Upma is... very up...and... memorable?"

She closed her eyes.

"Alas".

She explained it again

This time she asked another question.

"What is anuprasa?"

Ariman desperately searched for his memory.

"It politely repeats itself?"

"Closer than before".

Another explanation followed.

"And atishyokti?"

"That", replied Ariman with growing confidence, "must be what I'm experiencing right now".

Professor Prabha tried very hard not to laugh. Instead, she coughed.

"Continue listening."

For nearly an hour, the lecture continued.

The same sound was repeated.

"Let's now begin again from the introduction".

"Oh!" "No... no no".

"Oh yes yes yes yes".

The seven-year-old daughter turned over in her sleep, smiled and continued dreaming that her mother had transformed a burglar into a rehearsal audience.

Whenever she paused dramatically, Ariman applauded too early.

Whenever she expected silence, he nodded vigorously.

When she wanted thoughtful appreciation, he exclaimed, "Wonderful!".

Every mistake earned him another lesson, not only in Hindi literature but also in courtesy.

"If a scholar asks for your opinion".

She instructed, "think first".

"If someone is speaking, don't fidget".

"Never yawn before a lecturer".

"Maintain eye contact, but not continuously- that becomes uncomfortable!"

"When complimenting ideas be academic, and praise the idea before praising the delivery."

Poor Ariman worked harder than he had ever worked during any burglary

"Now express the speech in one word "she ordered

"Goodd", he urged.

"Oh, no!" She exclaimed.

"Ok, I shall -", she trained

"Say, supercalifragilisticexpialiadocious" she encouraged.

"Super-call-Fragy-expert-doctor" he Stuttered.

"Oh, please no" she fainted and spoke

"Ok, say Wonderful" she cried.

"Wondderfulll" he followed.

He applauded at the correct moment.

He took imaginary notes.

He repeated definitions.

He praised the structure of the lecture.

He admired the clarity of the examples.

He even volunteered to act as the audience, for the introduction one final time.

At last Professor Prabha smiled with contentment.

"That was acceptable."

Ariman looked as though he had completed three university examinations in a single night

With folded hands and complete humility, he said, "Professor... if it pleases you... may I now take your leave?"

"Certainly", she replied warmly.

As he reached the window, she added.

"You may come again."

Ariman turned around in disbelief.

She smiled.

"But not tomorrow"

"I shall be delivering this lecture"

Ariman bowed deeply.

"I assure you, Professor, tomorrow is the one day I had absolutely no intention of visiting sarda villa"

“I assure you, after tonight I have developed a lifelong respect for scholars... and a permanent fear of entering a house of a Hindi professor”

He went out through the same window, remembered her lesson, came back in, knocked on the window frame three times and waited for permission.

"Come in!"

"Thank you."

He immediately went out again.

From that night onward, the legend of Ariman spread across Saharsa-not as the thief who stole jewels, but as the only bungler in history who entered house to commit theft and left with a certificate in good manners, public and audience participation.

Nothing had been stolen from home that night.

Except, perhaps, a thief's Confidence - which had been quietly replaced with impeccable manners, a respectable introduction to Hindi poetics, and the firm Conviction that there are easier professions than burglary.