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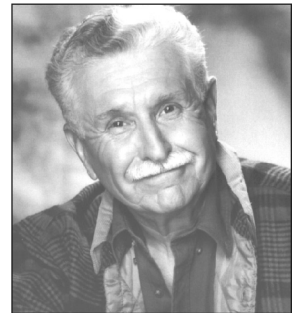
CHAPTER

The Gold Watch

Ponjikkara Raphy

➔ About the Author

Ponjikkara Raphy, a famous Malayalam writer, was born in Kerala in 1924. He is a Trade Unionist who criticized the working of the church and the priests. He was closely attached with the life of low paid workers. He has written both short stories and full length novels.



➔ About the Story

Sanku was a low paid worker in a factory. He had a small family having a wife and two children. A third child was also about to come. He had taken a lot of money on loan. He had so many economical problems. He had no way out to solve them except stealing the gold watch of the engineer. Does he steal the gold watch ? What are his feelings before stealing the watch ? What are the reactions after he did it ? Read the story to get the answers of these questions.



As on many previous nights, Sanku could not get any sleep that night. He turned and tossed in his bed, but it was no useThe more he thought, the worse he felt. He closed his eyes and lay on his torn mat, in the darkness. And yet he could see it as clearly as during the day; the deserted office room — when everyone had gone out for rest or for lunch. The glass window was only partly closed. On one end of the table inside were a few fat volumes, at the other end, a pen, an ink-bottle and so forth, and in between was a gold watch with its gold chain placed on a book.

Open the window and stretch out your hand about a foot and you can pick it up. Everyone is out for lunch! Nobody will know.....

Sanku remembered his efforts, his cowardice and his vacillation during the past few days. He had never seen anyone there at that time. And yet, he had been afraid. He had trembled and felt breathless. That was why he had refrained from taking the watch every time.

It would not do to put it off any longer. If he thought any further, he would not be able to do anything. He might even blurt out his intention accidentally. So he must take it tomorrow. Suppose he did not ?

Sanku's thoughts began to linger over the thorny problems of his life. Tomorrow would be the third day of the month. In another three days, he would get his pay — thirteen rupees for thirteen days. He had to pay four and a half rupees for purchases at the store; there would be a balance of eight and a half rupees. He had repaid only five out of the ten rupees he had borrowed from the Fund, the previous month to go home for his mother's death anniversary. No, he must pay the remaining five rupees with interest at six paise a rupee a week. At the tea-shop, he owed over three rupees for two weeks, besides previous arrears amounting to a rupee and a half. He owed six rupees to Ali for supplying extra rice, beedis and other odds and ends. One month's house-rent was three rupees. In addition to these sums, he had taken small loans of twelve paise, twenty-five paise and fifty paise from several people. And his wife had reminded him two days before about the one rupee to be paid to the fish-woman. Sanku mentally added up the total amount that he needed.

What he was going to get was just eight and a half rupees. What he owed was twenty-two rupees thirteen paise. He had other needs too. He had borrowed three rupees from his wife. This was out of the sum she had slowly saved up now and then in order to buy a waist-chain for the younger child. He had assured her that he would buy it out of his pay that month.

Sanku's heart beat uncontrollably fast. Through his heart-beats, he could hear the harsh voice of the tea-shop owner, Kochunni, Ali's hollow laughter and vulgar words and the irritating talk of Lonappao who was in charge of the Fund. He felt that they were all surrounding him like rowdy boys, armed with sticks, gathering around a stray dog. What a horrible scene!

Finding it unbearable, Sanku turned over on his stomach and thought, "I have no alternative but to pick it up tomorrow. Will it not fetch at least twenty rupees? Even fifteen will do! Fifteen plus eight and half, that is twenty three and a half rupees. It will fetch more than fifteen." He would be able to pay his debts, and live in peace. A life free from debts! With a feeling of relief he drifted into a light sleep.

It was morning.

"What, are you still asleep?" Sanku's wife said gently shaking his shoulders. "It is long after sunrise." Sanku raised his head at once. His wife picked up the younger child who was crawling up to her, and asked Sanku, "Don't you have to go to work today?"

"O yes," he said, and got out of bed.

He stepped down into the courtyard in a hurry, watching the golden rays of the morning sun piercing the lush bamboo foliage on the eastern side and brightening the old palm-leaf thatch. He washed his face and hands as usual, put on his working clothes, and was about to leave for his factory when his wife said:

"Listen, you must buy some ointment for the child!" She threw a commanding look at him. Sanku felt that each of the sores on the child's festering body was staring at him in a gruesome way. A moment passed in silence.

"What sort of ointment?" Sanku asked like a fool.

"Ointment for the sores", continued the wife. "You mean you have not seen the sores all over the child's body!"

"Yes, How many paise worth of ointment?"

"At least 13 paise worth. We must apply it for three days at least."

"H'm," Sanku began to walk with bent head.

"Please," she called out in a soft voice. Sanku looked back. She spoke gently, "Please, bring two ripe bananas when you come back in the evening — the baby starts crying at night — and I have no milk to give him".

She stood there pulling up her blouse with her left hand. Then Sanku noticed her belly bulging out ! Was yet another burden on the way, Sanku was stunned. He cursed himself, and with a deep sigh, he resumed his walk to the factory.

"Listen ! Do not forget," the wife reminded him. Sanku nodded his head and walked on.

At one o'clock the bell rang for the interval. Everyone rushed in haste to homes, hotels or tea-shops for lunch. Sanku was the only one who did not go anywhere. He stood leaning against a pillar in a corner on the west side of the office. His heart was clouded and bursting with impatience.

A few moments passed. The engineer, a short, fat Englishman with cat-like eyes, who looked like a marble statue, got out of the room, closed the door, and left. As usual, there was no watch on his wrist. Sanku's heart felt cool with relief. A few more moments passed. Sanku looked all around; there was nobody in sight.

He walked towards the office. The glass-window, as usual, was only partially closed. The gold watch was on the table. How it glittered. His heart beat faster. The Englishman would return after lunch and his siesta only by four o'clock ! A good opportunity ! There was nobody around !

One, two, three... six or seven minutes passed. Suddenly Sanku thought; suppose someone sees me ! As in the past few days, fear pushed him forward. He took a few steps, looked around, but saw no one. Prompted again by urgent need he walked towards the room. Once again he looked around. Nobody was there ! A shudder passed through his veins; his heart throbbed. One second passed. He stretched out a hand and the gold watch was in it. Nervously, his eyes made a quick survey. No one was there at all. Trembling, he put the watch in the pocket of his trousers. He held his breath and walked forward in haste. After about ten steps, he looked back. Then he saw someone walking quickly along the eastern corridor.

Obviously, he was going to the time-keeper's office. He must have seen everything ! Perhaps he was hastening to inform the watchman at the gate. Oh God ! Had he bungled ? Sanku stood like a pillar, petrified.

The gold watch seemed to burn his pocket like a burning cinder. It sent sparks along his nerves. The whole world seemed to be spinning around him in a blazing fire. Flames arose from every particle of sand ! No shade of coolness anywhere ! Everything was on fire, burning, burning.

"Brother Sanku, why are you standing here like a pillar ?" Sanku turned with a start and saw Madhavan standing close by. Sanku stammered out.

"No reason.....for nothing."

"God on my liar !" Madhavan said with a laugh and walked away to his work. He

must have gone and reported the theft ! My God ! Everyone probably knew about it All the eight hundred odd workers at the factory would surround him noisily. They would look at him in scorn. They would all remark with derision : "Thief ! Thief !" Then he would be taken before the white boss, and reprimanded. How sternly he would look at him ! Sanku would surely be dismissed. That fellow, Vackey, was dismissed just for taking an old umbrella.

A cold fear entered Sanku's heart which was choked with depressing thoughts.

The guard would be waiting at the entrance of the time-keeper's office. He would catch him. No, that way lay danger. He would put this back in its place; a scorching cinder that was burning him. But then "Oh, no !" he said to himself on second thoughts. But finally he made up his mind. He was at the office room. The window still remained half open ! Sanku looked around. No one was there, no one at all ! He took the gold watch quickly out of his pocket. His hand trembled like an aspen leaf. He presently remembered his home and his unpaid debts.

What was to be done ? Sanku felt suffocated. The sound of a footstep behind him ? Someone was returning ! He put the watch on the table and breathlessly walked away.

||Glossary||

deserted	— forsaken (एकान्त)
gently	— politely (कोमलता से)
vacillation	— hesitation (हिचकिचाहट)
trembled	— shivered (काँपना, हिलना)
refrained	— stopped (रुकना)
to put it off	— to postpone it (इसे स्थगित करना)
blurt	— say something all of sudden (अचानक कुछ कहना)
intention	— design, purpose (आशय, उद्देश्य, इच्छा)
odds and ends	— small articles (छोटे-छोटे सौदे)
vulgar	— ill mannered (बदतमीज)
rowdy	— rough, coarse (भद्दा, असभ्य)
drifted into a light sleep	— snapped (झपकी)
festering body	— diseased body, full of boils (फफोलेदार शरीर)
gruesome	— terrible (भयानक)
siesta	— period of rest taken in the afternoon. (दोपहर बाद आराम का समय)
shudder	— trembling with fear (भय से काँपना)
survey	— observation (निरीक्षण, अवलोकन)
petrified	— turned to stone (पत्थर बन जाना, स्थिर हो जाना)
cinder	— partly burnt a piece of wood or coal (अधजली लकड़ी या कोयले का टुकड़ा)
derision	— mockery (हँसी)
reprimand	— chide, scold (फटकार लगाना)

sternly	— rigidly (दृढ़ता)
scorching	— much hot (अत्यधिक गर्म)
cowardice	— timidity (कायरता)
accidentally	— by chance (संयोगवश)
thorny	— difficult (कठिन)
sore	— wound (घाव)
bulging	— coming out (उभर आना)
haste	— hurry (शीघ्रता)
glittered	— blazing (प्रज्वलित करना)
prompted	— excited, motivated (उकसाया)
throbbed	— beat fast (निर्दयता से पीटना)
spinning	— going round and round (चारों ओर घूमना)
probably	— perhaps (शायद)
stammered out	— spoke haltingly (हकलाकर बोलना)
scorn	— hatred (घृणा)
breathlessly	— short of breath (बिना साँस लिए)
so forth	— so on (इन शब्दों से किसी घटनाक्रम के होने का ज्ञान होता है)
linger	— delay, stay (ठहरना)
thorny	— painful, full of thorns, difficult (काँटेदार)
arrears	— outstanding debts (कर्ज)
hollow	— insincere, false (मिथ्या)
alternative	— choice (विकल्प)
lush foliage	— thick green leaves (मोटी हरी पत्तियाँ)
commanding look	— ordering sense (आदेशपूर्ण दृष्टि)
bulging out	— swelling, coming out (निकली हुई)
on the way	— likely to come (मार्ग पर, आने को)
another burden on the way	— refers to the pregnancy of Sanku's wife (एक बोझ आने को)
stunned	— shocked (दुःख से सन्न रह जाना)
clouded	— gloomy (अन्धकारपूर्ण)
glittered	— looked bright (चमकी)
throbbed	— beat violently and fast (निर्दयता से पीटना)
corridor	— gallery (गैलरी का स्थान)
bungled	— made a mistake (गलती की)
blazing	— burning brightly (तेजी से जलना)
with a start	— with surprise, with alarm (चौंककर)
choke	— suffocate (दम घुटना)
depressing	— disheartening (निराश, हताश)
turned and tossed	— (करवटें बदलता रहा)
partly	— some people are unwilling to attend the classes (आंशिक रूप से)

stretch	— spread (फैलाना)
reminded	— make someone (याद दिलाया)
owed	— indebted (ऋणी था)
assured	— made someone believe (आश्वस्त किया)
vulgar words	— abuses (गालियाँ)
shaking	— moving (हिलाते हुए)
picked up	— lifted up (उठा लिया)
crawling	— a slow movement (रेंगते हुए)
thatch	— shed (छप्पर)
staring	— gazing (घूरते हुए)
festering body	— to become badly infected body (फोड़े-फुन्सी युक्त शरीर)
nodded	— shook his head in approval (सहमति में सिर हिलाया)
resumed	— proceeded (दोबारा शुरू करना)
need	— requirement (जरूरत)
obviously	— clearly (स्पष्ट रूप से)

||Exercise||

➡ Short Answer Type Questions :

Answer the following questions in not more than 30 words each :

1. Where did Sanku work ? What were his problems ?
2. What time of day did Sanku think, was the most suitable for stealing the gold watch and why ?
3. What stopped Sanku from stealing the watch in the beginning ?
4. What made Sanku steal the gold watch ?
5. Why could Sanku no longer postpone the act of stealing ?
7. Why did Sanku not get any sleep for several days ?
8. Describe Sanku's feelings before stealing the watch.
Or What were Sanku's feelings before stealing the watch ?
9. What thoughts troubled Sanku after committing the theft ?
10. How do you know that Sanku loved his wife very much?
11. Why did Sanku put the watch back on the table ?
Or Why did Sanku not steal watch after all.
Or What made Sanku put the watch back on the table?
12. What did Sanku's wife ask him to bring from the market ?
13. How do you know that Sanku lacked the traits of a thief?
14. At what time did Sanku decide to steal the watch and why?
15. Why did Sanku steal the watch?
Or What made Sanku decide that he had no other choice but to steal?
16. What were Sanku's problems and how did he plan to solve them?
17. Why did Sanku feel suffocated?

