

# The Mango Thief

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*By Naramsetti Umamaheswara Rao*



Ricky was a boy known for his mischievous nature. Though he was in the eighth grade, he had the sharpness and boldness of someone older. Ricky rarely attended school, preferring instead to roam around the fields beside the road, cutting sugarcane and plucking groundnuts, causing damage to the crops.

In his class, there was a bright and studious boy named Anand. Ricky thought it would be advantageous to befriend Anand to get his notes. The next day, Ricky brought some guavas he had stolen and offered them to Anand, saying, “These are from

our orchard. They're very sweet; take them." Although Anand initially refused, Ricky insisted and placed the fruits in his hands, and Anand, not wanting to seem rude, reluctantly accepted them.

Over the following days, Ricky brought sugarcane and groundnuts, further solidifying their friendship. Ricky began inviting Anand to accompany him when he went out, and Anand, hesitant to refuse, would often join him. Their classmates noticed this and warned Anand, saying, "Don't hang out with him. Being with him could get you into trouble."

But Anand dismissed their concerns, thinking, "I'm a good person, so nothing bad will happen to me. Maybe Ricky will change for the better."

One day after school, as they were walking home, Ricky suggested they enter a mango orchard along the way. Anand hesitated, knowing it was wrong, but Ricky was persistent. Ignoring Anand's reluctance, Ricky said, "If you're so scared, stay here. I'll go in alone." Ricky then climbed over the fence, entered the orchard and began plucking ripe mangoes, stuffing them into his school bag.

What Ricky didn't know was that the orchard's caretaker had been keeping a close watch. He was already angry about frequent thefts and was determined to catch the thief red-handed. Seeing Ricky pluck the mangoes, the caretaker approached

the tree with a stick in hand and shouted, “Hey, you little thief! Come down! I’ll teach you a lesson!”

Ricky, momentarily startled, quickly regained his composure. He was used to such situations. “What can you do?” Ricky challenged, “You’re all alone, and there are two of us. We could easily overpower you, and no one would know.”

The caretaker, growing more furious, demanded, “Where’s the other one?”

Ricky pointed towards Anand, who was outside the fence, and said, “He’s waiting over there, keeping an eye out for me.” The caretaker, not seeing clearly, took a couple of steps to get a better view and thought he spotted someone. But when he turned back to the tree, Ricky had already jumped down and escaped.

The caretaker, enraged, thought, “Not only does this kid steal, but he also dares to threaten me?” He chased after Ricky but couldn’t catch him. Frustrated, he decided to catch the other boy instead, thinking it would lead him to Ricky later.

Ricky saw the caretaker running towards Anand but chose not to warn him.

Anand, seeing the caretaker approaching, remained calm, thinking, “Why should I be afraid? I haven’t done anything wrong.”

But as soon as the caretaker reached him, he grabbed Anand's hair and began hitting him on the back.

"Why are you hitting me? What have I done? I didn't even enter your orchard," Anand cried.

The caretaker slapped him twice and said, "You dare ask what you did? No shame? You came here to steal, sent your friend inside, and stayed outside to keep watch? Come with me, I'll tie you to the tree. You two have been stealing my mangoes every day. I won't release you until my boss arrives," he said, dragging Anand inside the orchard.

Despite Anand's protests and pleas of innocence, the caretaker refused to listen and tied him to a tree.

Passersby noticed Anand tied to the tree and, shocked by the sight, informed his parents. They came and freed him, explaining the situation to the villagers. Anand insisted that he hadn't done anything wrong.

The villagers scolded him, saying, "Your mistake was befriending a bad boy. What else did you expect?"

Regretful, Anand lamented, "Despite my friends' warnings, I knowingly continued my friendship with Ricky. I've learned my lesson. I won't make this mistake again."

**Naramsetti Umamaheswararao** has written more than a thousand stories, songs, and novels for children over 42 years. he has published 32 books. His