

The Scribe-Kristin Hunter

The Scribe is a short story written by Kristin Hunter. The story is about a 13-year-old boy named James. The story begins with James going to the Wash-a-Mat to get some change for money. Old man Silver and old man Dollar are the owners of the Silver Dollar Check Cashing Service. They charge innocent, illiterate people fifty cents to one dollar for services like addressing letters, reading, and filling out forms.

James feels angry and sad. He asks his mother the reason. His mother tells him about the historical struggle with illiteracy in their African American community. She compares the situation to biblical times when only a select group, the scribes, were capable of reading and writing.

James decides to help the illiterate people. He sets up a makeshift office outside the Silver Dollar Check Cashing Service. An old lady approaches James, and asks him to read her grandson's letter. She gives James a quarter for his help, but he refuses to accept the money. This news spread and many approach James for help. However, his efforts land him in trouble. He is told by a police officer that he needs a license to operate such a business. He reluctantly agrees to charge a nominal fee of a quarter for his services, but is warned that conducting business without a license is illegal.

James inquires his parents how they encash their cheque. They say that they have an account in a bank where they debit cash for free without charges. He learns that a majority of Black people are afraid of banks, with some even misunderstanding that banks are only for the white people.

Next day, James convinces three people—a young man, an old man, and an old lady—to visit Trust National Bank, where they can cash cheques for free. However, the young man and the old man change their minds along the way to the bank. Despite the initial hesitation, an old lady Mrs. Minnie Franklin, stays with him. Mrs. Adams helps them. James is pleased to see her making efforts to be an independent woman. "Don't be afraid to try a thing just because you've never done it before," he encourages. Under James's guidance, she opens her first bank account, making him incredibly proud.

Kristin Hunter's The Scribe explores themes of exploitation, social inequality, and the transformative power of education. The story motivates readers to think about the importance of education and the need for positive role models who can bring about positive changes in the society.