

THE RATTRAP

-Selma Lagerlof

A philosophical rattrap seller:

Once there was a man who made rattrops of wire and went around selling them. However, occasionally he had to turn to begging and stealing. He looked at the world with vengeance for being unkind to him. He entertained himself with the idea of the world being nothing but a big rattrap where the riches act as baits to lure and trap people for life.

Crofters' thirty kronor bills stolen:

One evening the rattrap peddler took shelter in an old man's cottage, who had been a crofter at Ramsjö Ironworks. The amiable and generous man offered him dinner and tobacco. He even showed him the thirty kronor bills, earned by selling his cows' milk, kept in a leather pouch that hung near the window. However, the next morning, the rattrap peddler stole the money and made his escape through the forest.

Caught in the big rattrap called world:

But as he got lost in the woods, he realised that the thirty kronor bills had been a bait to trap him in the huge rattrap that the world is.

The Ramsjö Ironworks the ironmaster:

Nevertheless, he kept walking. Attracted by a regular thumping, he reached the Ramsjö Ironworks, where the blacksmith allowed him to spend the night. Soon, the owner of the mill arrived for a nightly inspection. The ironmaster mistook the peddler for an old acquaintance, Nils Olof (Captain von Stahle). The rattrap seller thought of taking advantage of the opportunity but soon decided against it when he was invited to his home as he feared the discovery of the stolen money. But the unsuspecting ironmaster wasn't willing to leave the matter. He informed the rattrap peddler how, after the death of his wife and departure of his sons, he was left only in the company of his oldest daughter and that he wished to have company for Christmas. When he had failed to persuade the rattrap peddler, he sent his daughter to bring him home.

The invitation:

Edla Willmansson, the shy and modest daughter of the ironmaster, came to persuade the peddler to come to their home for Christmas. By his frightened look, she guessed that the peddler had either stolen something or has escaped prison. So she hinted an assurance that he would be free to leave whenever he wanted. Reassured, he accepted the invitation. However, the idea of being trapped did not leave him. On the way to the manor, he regretted stealing the money from the crofter and once again considered himself caught in the trap.

The change of events for the peddler:

The following morning, on Christmas Eve, the ironmaster and his daughter discussed how to help the peddler. The ironmaster planned to help him regain his health and also to assist him in finding a vocation for himself. The peddler was bathed, saved and given a hair-cut. However, when the peddler - in clean suit and shoes - presented himself to his host, the ironmaster was shocked to realise his mistake. He demanded an explanation from the peddler and threatened to hand him over to the sheriff. Suddenly, the rattrap peddler put forward his idea of the world being a rattrap and that one day even the ironmaster may become caught in it. The ironmaster laughed it off and ordered the rattrap peddler to leave at the earliest.

Edla's intervention:

However, before he could actually leave, the daughter intervened. She had been in high spirits that morning thinking of the ways in which she could help the peddler. However, not wanting to express her own feelings, she beseeched her father on the behalf of the rattrap peddler to enjoy just one day at their place. The father finally gave in to his daughter's request, hoping that they would not regret the decision later on. Throughout the day, the rattrap peddler did not utter a word. He merely ate and slept. He had to be woken up for even meals. At the end of the day, when he was told by Edla that he was welcome to return on the next Christmas Eve, he was flabbergasted.

Theft of thirty kronor bills revealed

Next morning, in the church, the ironmaster and Edla were shocked to find that a certain rattrap seller had robbed one of their old crofters. As they returned, the father wondered what all the rattrap peddler would have robbed them of. The daughter, however, felt dejected. On returning home, they were informed, by the valet, that the man had left empty handed. On the contrary, he had left a package, as a Christmas present, for Edla.

A Christmas gift for Edla

The peddler left a package containing a small rattrap with the three ten kronor bills that he had stolen from the crofter. Along with that he left a letter thanking Edla for her generosity and asking her to return the bills to the crofter. He wrote, the rattrap is a Christmas present from a rat who would have been caught in this worlds rattrap if he had not been raised to captain, because in that way he got power to clear himself. It was signed as Captain Von Stahle

SOLVED SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS:

Q1. The crofter can be called a good host. Why?

Ans. The crofter as a wonderful host is proved from the fact that he not only treats the peddler very kindly and offers him food and shelter willingly, but also reposes full faith in him and shows the thirty kroners he had with him.

Q2. How did the tramp make his living? What idea do you get about him from the way he earned to keep his body and soul together?

Ans. The tramp earned his living by making and selling rattraps that he made himself at odd moments from the material that he begged from here and there. His endeavour to earn a living in this way shows that he was enterprising, hardworking and was keen to avoid begging.

Q3. Generally speaking, how did the world treat the tramp?

Ans. The tramp was treated with great contempt. He was not welcomed anywhere. In fact, he was chased away from wherever he went. So much so that, even if someone granted him a favour, he couldn't see anything better than scorn and indifference in the eyes of his benefactor.

Q.4 What did the peddler think about rattraps when he lost his way in the forest? How was it different from his previous thoughts about rattraps?

Ans. At first the peddler thought that the whole world was nothing but a big rattrap. It baited people but as soon as they were tempted, it closed in on them, and then everything came to an end. After taking the money in his pocket, the peddler lost his way in the wood. He realized then that it was his turn to be trapped. He had let himself be fooled by a bait and had been caught. The whole forest closed in upon him like a prison from which he could never escape.

Q5. How did the ironmaster interpret the peddler's refusal to accept his invitation to the manor house?

Ans. The ironmaster had no doubt in his mind about the identity of the tramp. He thought that his guest, whom luck had ill-treated, was embarrassed to go to manor house in rags. Since, he had seen better days, his current dilapidated state prevented him from accepting his invitation.

Q.6 Why did the rattrap peddler not reveal his identity to the ironmaster?

Ans. In the forge, while the haughty blacksmith had ignored him, the ironmaster came to him and scrutinized him. The man with the rattraps had never before seen the ironmaster and did not even know what his name was. But he thought that if the owner of the mill thought that he was an old contact, he might perhaps give him a couple of kronor. Therefore, he did not want to reveal his identity at once to him.

Q7. Why did the tramp sign the letter as Captain Von Stahle ?

Ans. The tramp, though illiterate and a thief, found himself raised to a captain through Edla's kindness and compassion. He got a chance to redeem himself and hence he signs the letter as captain Von Stahle.

LONG ANSWER QUESTIONS

1. Do you think that one act of kindness can really change a person's view of the world? Discuss
Value points: Yes I do agree that one act of kindness can really change a person's view— of the world. This has been exemplified in the chapter by the man selling rattraps.
 - In the beginning of the chapter the man is dejected and disillusioned
 - because he could not live a contented life in spite of his doing work to make his living. He had no positive experiences about life and considered the whole

- world with its lands and seas, its cities and villages to be a big rattrap. The ironmaster's daughter treats him with respect and shows compassion
- and understanding towards his condition. She does not force herself upon him but tries to persuade him to spend
- Christmas eve with them. He reposes trust in her due to her friendliness.
- Later she persuades her father not to send the man away when his identity is revealed as they had invited him and promised him Christmas cheer. She also tells him that he is welcome again next year if he wishes so.
- This brings about a change in the man and he is reformed.

2. Both the Crofter and Edla Willmanson were kind and hospitable to the tramp. But he repays crofters' kindness by stealing his money while Edla is able to transform him to a better human being. Why?

Value points:

Crofter very hospitable

- Welcomes with a smile
- gives him supper and shares his tobacco
- Tells him about income
- shows him the money
- very trusting and friendly Stealing a way of life for the tramp-no twinge of conscience while stealing But later he realizes that he who prided himself in not being caught in the rattrap was caught in it by stealing Feels depressed.
- Edla's kindness and hospitality awakens his conscience
- Realizes that there is a way out of the trap
- Returns the money through Edla

3. The story "The Rattrap" focuses on human loneliness and the need to bond with others. Comment.

Value points:

The theme of loneliness runs throughout the story.

- All the characters suffer from loneliness and seek redemption from it. The protagonist himself feels lonely.
- He has always met sour faces, cold words and unkind treatment
- There is no one to share his depressing or amusing thoughts.
- He is always chased away by the people.→ The old man Crofter yearns for company in absence of a wife and children. Similarly the iron master and his daughter too miss company which gnaws their hearts all the more on occasion of Christmas. The crofter and the iron master play hosts to the peddler to kill their loneliness.
- All of them have a strong desire of bonding. Bonding gives joy to the crofter, iron master and his daughter.
- At the end bonding transforms the tramp and awakens the goodness of his heart.