

The Rattrap

Short answer type questions (textual)

- Q.1** From where did the peddler get the idea of the world being a rattrap?
Ans.1 The peddler used to sell rattraps. He had naturally been thinking of his rattraps when suddenly he was struck by the idea that the whole world with its lands and seas was nothing but a big rattrap. It offered riches & joys, shelter & food, heat & clothing in the same manner as the rattrap offered cheese & pork. As soon as someone let himself be tempted to touch the bait, it closed on him, and then everything came to an end.
- Q.2** Why was he amused by this idea?
Ans.2 His own life was sad & monotonous. The world had never been kind to him. So it became his favourite pastime to think of people who had let themselves be caught in the dangerous trap or who were still circling around the bait.
- Q.3** Did the peddler expect the kind of hospitality that he received from the crofter?
Ans.3 No, the hospitality was unexpected as people usually made sour faces when he asked for shelter. But the crofter served him porridge for supper & shared his tobacco roll with him. He also played a game of cards with him till bed time & talked to him happily. (This really shows that the man was generous in his hospitality.)
- Q.4** Why was the crofter so talkative and friendly with peddler?
Ans.4 The crofter's circumstances and temperament made him so talkative & friendly. Since he had no wife or child, he was happy to get someone to talk to in his loneliness. Secondly, he was quite generous with his confidences.
- Q.5** Why did he show the thirty kronor to the peddler?
Ans.5 The crofter had told the peddler that by supplying his cow's milk to the creamery, he had received thirty kronor in payment. The peddler seemed to doubt it. So, in order to convince him, he showed him thirty kronor. (He held them up before his eyes, nodding knowingly.) Perhaps he did it to test the integrity of the vagabond.
- Q.6** Did the peddler respect the confidence reposed in him by the crofter?
Ans.6 No, he didn't. He fell an easy prey to temptation. Half an hour after leaving the crofter's house, he came back again, smashed the window pane, took out the money and hung the leather pouch back in its place. He even felt pleased at his smartness.
- Q.7** What made the peddler think that he had indeed fallen into a rattrap?
Ans.7 After stealing thirty kronor, the peddler avoided walking on the public highway and went into the woods. Very soon he was lost in the big, confusing forest. He kept walking without coming to the end of the wood. He recalled his thoughts about the world and the rattrap. He realized that his own turn had come. He had let himself be fooled by a bait and had been caught.
- Q.8** Why did the ironmaster speak kindly to the peddler and invite him home?
Ans.8 The ironmaster went close up to the peddler. In the uncertain reflection from the furnace, he mistook him to be his old regimental comrade, Captain Von Stahle. He felt sorry that the captain had fallen on bad days. He addressed him as Nils Olof, spoke kindly and invited him home to give them company on Christmas.

- Q.9 Why did the peddler decline the invitation?
 Ans.9 The peddler knew that the ironmaster had mistaken him for his old regimental comrade. The truth would be out soon. Secondly, he had the stolen money thirty kronor on him. So, going to the manor house would be like throwing himself voluntarily into the lion's den (OR would be like entering the lion's den). So he declined the invitation. (He only wanted to sleep in the forge & sneak away as quietly as possible.)
- Q.10 What made the peddler accept Edla Willmansson's invitation?
 Ans.10 Miss Edla looked at the peddler quite compassionately. She noticed that the man was afraid. She assured him that he would be free to leave them after spending Christmas Eve with them. Her friendly manner made the peddler feel confidence in her and accept her invitation.
- Q.11 What doubts did Edla have about the peddler?
 Ans.11 Edla noticed that the man was afraid. She concluded that either he had stolen something or had escaped from jail. She also thought that he was afraid of being arrested or being cross-examined. (She also had doubts that the man had once been an educated man.)
- Q.12 When did the ironmaster realize his mistake?
 Ans.12 Next morning, the stranger was cleaned & well dressed. The valet had bathed him, cut his hair and shaved him. The evening before, he had seen him in the uncertain reflection from the furnace. Now when he saw him in broad daylight, it was impossible to mistake him for an old acquaintance. The ironmaster realised his mistake & threatened to call the sheriff.
- Q.13 What did the peddler say in his defence when it was clear that he was not the person the ironmaster had thought he was?
 Ans.13 The peddler explained that he was not at fault. He had never pretended to be an acquaintance. He had pleaded & begged to be allowed to stay in the forge. But no harm had been done. He was willing to put on his rags & go away.
- Q.14 Why did Edla still entertain the peddler even after she knew the truth about him?
 Ans.14 Edla felt that it would be wrong on their part to chase away a human being whom they had asked to come to their house and had promised him Christmas cheer. She understood that the man was leading a troubled life. He had no one to call his own. He wasn't welcome anywhere. So she wanted him to enjoy a day of peace with them.
- Q.15 Why was Edla happy to see the gift left by the peddler?
 Ans.15 When Edla opened the package, she found a small rattrap with three wrinkled ten kronor notes & a letter addressed to her. The peddler wanted to be nice in return as she had been so nice to him all day long. He did not want her to be embarrassed at the Christmas season by a thief. Edla felt greatly relieved that she had not made a mistake by giving shelter to the peddler. He had after all not broken her trust. So she was happy to see the gift.
- Q.16 Why did the peddler sign himself as Captain Von Stable?
 Ans.16 The peddler was a vagabond. The world had never been kind to him. But at the ironmaster's house Edla treated him as a real captain even after the reality became known. This elevated position gave him the power to behave like a real captain and clear himself of his dishonest ways. So he signed himself as Captain Von Stable. Edla's act of kindness brought out his basic goodness.

Additional questions

Q.1

Ans.1

What personal information did the crofter impart to his guest?
He told his guest that in his days of prosperity he had been a crofter at Ramsjö ironworks. Then he worked on the land. Now he was unable to do physical labour. His cow supported him now. He supplied her milk to creamery everyday. Last month he had received thirty kronor in payment.

Q.2

Ans.2

How did he feel while walking through the forest? What did he realise?
During the first few hours the woods caused no difficulty. Later in the day it became worse as it was a big & confusing jungle. The paths twisted back & forth. He kept walking without coming to the end of the wood. He recalled his thoughts about the world and the rattrap. He realised that his own turn had come. He had let himself be fooled by a bait and had been caught.

Q.3

Ans.3

What did the ironmaster assume the reason behind the old captain's refusal? How did he try to reassure him?

The ironmaster assumed that his old regimental comrade felt embarrassed because of his miserable clothing.

He said that his house was not so fine that he could not come there. His wife Elizabeth was dead & boys were abroad. He lived there only with his daughter.

Q.4

How did the stranger try to save himself when the ironmaster threatened to call the police?

OR

Why did the ironmaster drop the idea of calling the sheriff?

Ans.4

The peddler said that the sheriff might come & lock him up but the ironmaster must remember that a day might come when he was tempted & then he would be caught in the big rattrap of the world. The metaphor amused the ironmaster. He dropped the idea of calling the sheriff but asked him to leave at once.

Q.5

Ans.5

Before leaving the ironmaster's home. Why did the stranger stare at Edla in boundless amazement?

Edla told him that the suit which he wore was to be a Christmas present from her father. He didn't have to return it.

If he wanted to spend the next Christmas eve peacefully, he would be welcomed back. This amazed him.

Q.6

Ans.6

Why did the girl feel dejected while returning from the church?

1) She had learned at church that one of the old crofters at the ironworks had been robbed by a man who went around selling rattraps.

2) Her father taunted her & held her responsible for letting a 'fine fellow' into the house.

Q.7

Ans.7

Sum up the contents of the peddler's letter to Edla

The stranger didn't want her to be embarrassed at Christmas season by a thief. Since she had been nice to him as if he were a captain, he would be nice to her as if were a real captain. He asked her to return the money to the old crofter. The rattrap was a present from a rat who would have been caught in the world's rattrap if he had not been lured to the captain. It was as captain that he got the power to clear himself.

The Rattrap (Long answer questions)

Q.1 How does the peddler interpret the acts of kindness and hospitality shown by the crofter, the ironmaster and his daughter?

Ans.1 The peddler is a vagabond. He goes around selling small rattraps. He had to resort to both begging and small thefts to keep body & soul together. He interprets the acts of kindness & hospitality shown by different people differently.

When the peddler knocks on the door of the old crofter, he expects some 'sour faces' at the door. But the old man gives him a pleasant surprise. He is happy to find a man in his loneliness. He offers him supper. They play 'mjolis'. But the peddler does not respect the confidence the host reposes in him and runs away with his money.

Similarly, he is not much impressed by the hospitality shown by the ironmaster. He doesn't clear the ironmaster's doubt in the hope of getting a couple of kronors. Besides, with the stolen thirty kronors in his pocket, he thinks that going up to the manor house will be like throwing himself into the lion's den.

Finally, the acts of kindness of the ironmaster's daughter awaken the essential goodness in the peddler. Her sympathy and understanding leave a deep impression on him he doesn't want to put her to shame. He leaves thirty kronors to be returned to the old crofter. He writes a letter expressing his gratitude to her. He also leaves a Christmas present for her.

Q.2 What are the instances in the story that show that the character of the daughter is different from that of the ironmaster in many ways?

Ans.2 Various instances prove that the character of ironmaster is different from that of his daughter. Though both are quite social & good human beings, the ironmaster is impulsive whereas his daughter is cool, logical, kind & thoughtful. His decisions are hasty. In the uncertain light of the furnace, he mistakes the stranger for his old regimental comrade. He invites him home & thinks of feeding, clothing & helping him with job. But when he realises his mistake, he calls the man dishonest, demands an explanation & is ready to call in the sheriff. Edla, on the other hand, considers it unethical to chase away a man whom they had promised Christmas cheer & insists on honouring the promise.

Edla is more observant. She is a better judge of human beings & situations. She notices the fear of the stranger & thinks that either he is a run away prisoner or a thief. She is gentle, kind, compassionate & friendly to him. She understands that the man has a troubled life and isn't welcome anywhere. She treats him nicely even after knowing the mistake in identity.

Edla has basic human qualities. Even her father realises that she has better persuasive power than he has. Therefore, he sends her to persuade the peddler to bring him to the manor house.

It is Edla's love, understanding & selfless hospitality that awakens the basic goodness of the tramp and he clears himself of his dishonest ways in the end.

Q.3 The story has many instances of unexpected reactions from the characters to others' behaviour. Pick out instances of these surprises.

Ans.3 The story 'The rattrap' is full of surprises. The first sign of an unexpected reaction comes from the old crofter. When the peddler knocked on the door, he expected 'sour faces'. But the old crofter was happy to receive him. They have supper together. They smoke & play 'mjolis'. The behaviour of the peddler towards such a host is quite unexpected. His stealing of thirty kronors from the old man's pouch is an act of thanklessness.

The attitude of the ironmaster towards the peddler is quite strange. He takes an ordinary

vagabond for an old comrade and tries to force him to come to his house. Later, when he realises his mistake, he threatens to call the sheriff. But the peddler's comparison of the world to a rattrap makes him laugh and he drops the idea of calling the sheriff. We are surprised when Miss Edla insists on his stay despite knowing the truth about him. She finds it very bad to chase away someone whom they had invited home. She also invites him to spend next Christmas with them. The end of the story is quite surprising. When the ironmaster declares the peddler a thief, he raises his character to heroic heights. Not only does he ask them to give thirty kronors to the old crofter but also leaves a Christmas gift for Edla.

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ns.4

What made the peddler finally change his ways?

In the end the peddler is quite a transformed character. From a seller of small rattraps and a petty thief, he raises himself to heroic heights. This essential goodness in him is awakened through understanding & love of Miss Edla Willmansson.

When the truth about the peddler is exposed, the ironmaster can't tolerate his presence anymore. He asks him to go away at once. But then comes Edla. Being a compassionate person, she understands that the man has a troubled life. He also seems to be afraid of being arrested. So she would like to have him enjoy a day of peace with them.

Secondly, she doesn't think it ethical to chase away a human being whom they had promised 'Christmas cheer'. So the peddler has been able to sleep as quietly & safely as never before in his life. Edla offers him the suit as a Christmas present and invites him to spend the next Christmas also with them.

This makes the peddler mend his ways. He proves true to the faith Edla has reposed in him. He leaves behind three ten kronor notes & a letter of gratitude. The rattrap is a Christmas present from a 'rat' who would have been caught if he had not been 'raised to captain'.

Q.5
Ans.5

How does the metaphor of the rattrap serve to highlight the human predicament?

In the short story 'The Rattrap' the author uses the metaphor of the rattrap very effectively to highlight the human predicament.

The peddler, while thinking of his rattraps, is suddenly struck by an idea. The whole world with its lands and seas, its cities and villages is nothing but a big rattrap. The world exists only for one thing. It sets baits for people. The riches and joys, shelter and food, heat and clothing are just baits. They are like cheese & pork offered by the rattrap. The moment one is tempted to touch the bait, the trap closes in on him. Then everything comes to an end.

The peddler recalls his thoughts about the world and the rattrap when he is lost in a big & confusing forest. Now his own turn has come. He has let himself be fooled by a bait.

Those thirty kronors in the crofter's pouch are a bait. He steals them and is caught.

Again, going to manor house would mean throwing himself voluntarily into the lion's den.

The metaphor is effectively used when the peddler describes human predicament to the ironmaster. He says "all the goods that are offered are nothing but baits set out to drag a poor fellow in to trouble."

In the end the peddler left the rattrap as Christmas present from a 'rat' who would have been caught in this world's rattrap if he had not been 'raised to captain'. That way he got the power to clear himself.

The story leaves a moral that if you take something you want wrongfully, you might get trapped in life by your own circumstances.

The peddler comes out as a person with a subtle sense of humour. How does this serve in lightening the seriousness of the theme of the story and also endear him to us?

The peddler has a subtle sense of humour. He is not overburdened with morality. He doesn't mind resorting to both begging and thievery to 'keep body & soul together'.

He has a natural tendency to philosophise life. It makes life less burdensome. His sense of humour makes him accept that he is a rat like all other human beings. The very rattrap theory of the peddler is both humorous & philosophical. The world is nothing but a big rattrap with its joys like baits. Anyone who touches the bait, the rattrap closes in on him. It is even more of a fun when he himself gets caught by the trap.

When the ironmaster mistakes him for an old regimental comrade, he lets this misunderstanding prevail on him. He might throw him a couple of kronor. He makes the ironmaster laugh with his metaphor of the rattrap. Even the ironmaster accepts that it was "not so badly said".

Finally his letter with the 'christmas present from a rat' to Edla is a fine example of his capacity to make others laugh at him.