

ENGLISH

CHAPTER 4: THE RATTRAP



THE RATTRAP

~Summary~

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The Rattrap Peddler and his Thoughts About the World

Once upon a time, there was a vagabond who went around selling small rattraps. He made them from the material he got by begging. The business was not profitable, so he had to beg and even steal to survive. His clothes were in rags, his cheeks were sunken and hunger gleamed in his eyes.

While he was engrossed in his thoughts about rattraps one day, a very amusing thought came to his mind that the world was a big rattrap. It offered comforts and joys just like the rattrap offered cheese and pork. As soon as a rat was tempted to touch the bait, it trapped him.

The Crofter Treats the Peddler Nicely but the Peddler Cheats him

One dark evening, as the peddler was trudging along the road, he went to a small grey cottage, seeking shelter for the night. The owner, who had once been a crofter, not only invited him in, but was happy to get someone to talk to. The crofter, who had no wife or children, was very talkative and shared much about himself with the peddler. He informed the peddler that during his days of prosperity, he worked at the Ramsjö Ironworks. Now, his cow supported him. He even shared the fact that he had earned thirty kronor by selling the cow's milk. The guest seemed incredulous, so the crofter showed him the money, also revealing where it was kept. Next day, both left the cottage at the same time. But, half an hour later the peddler returned. He went up to the window, smashed a pane and took out the thirty kronor from the pouch in which they were kept.

The Vagabond is Pleased with his Smartness; Gets Lost in the Woods

The vagabond was quite pleased with his smartness. He avoided the public highway and turned into the wood, as he felt he would be safer and no one would be able to catch him. It was a big and confusing forest. He tried to walk in a definite direction, but the paths twisted back and forth so strangely that he was confused. He walked on and on and soon realised that he had been walking around in the same part of the forest.

All at once, he recalled his thoughts about the world being a rattrap. Now, his own turn had come. He had let himself be fooled by the bait and had been caught in a rattrap. The entire forest, with its trees, trunks and branches, seemed to him like a prison that offered no escape.

The Peddler Meets the Ironmaster; Declines his Invitation

Finally, the peddler saw no way out. He was so overwhelmed with exhaustion that he sank down to the ground, tired to death, thinking that his last moment had come. Just then, he heard the sound of the regular thumping of a hammer. He realised that the sound was coming from an iron mill. He summoned all his strength and walked in the direction of the sound.

He reached the Ramsjö Ironworks, which was then a large plant with smelter, rolling mill and forge. He entered the ironworks amidst the different sounds coming from the work going on in full swing. It was quite usual for persons like him to be attracted by the warmth and shelter of the forge, so he was ignored by the blacksmiths. The master blacksmith rather haughtily granted him permission to stay.

Soon, the ironmaster came into the forge for his inspection and noticed the peddler. He mistook him in the dim light for an old regimental comrade and addressed him as Nils Olof. The peddler didn't try to clear his doubt, as he thought the ironmaster might give him some money. The ironmaster invited him home. The peddler thought that going to the manor house would be like 'throwing himself voluntarily into the lion's den'. So, he declined the invitation.

Ironmaster Sends his Daughter Edla to Persuade the Peddler

The ironmaster assumed that the Peddler felt embarrassed because of his miserable clothing. He tried to comfort the peddler by informing him that there was nothing to be ashamed about. He further told him that his wife Elizabeth was dead, his sons were settled abroad and he lived with his daughter Edla. But the tramp constantly refused to go with him. The ironmaster went away, but he was not deterred by the peddler's persistent refusal. He sent his daughter to persuade the peddler. When Edla came to the ironworks, she found the man alarmed and frightened.

She tried to comfort him. She somehow sensed that his fear conveyed that he was either a thief on the run or an escaped prisoner. Still, she was very friendly and kind to the peddler. The peddler felt confidence in her and accepted the invitation. He felt guilty and cursed himself for stealing the crofter's money.

Edla Expresses her Doubts About the Peddler

The next day was Christmas Eve. The ironmaster was happy that he would be spending his time with an old friend. He told Edla that they needed to feed him well and provide him with a better

business than selling ratttraps. Edla said that she was doubtful about the peddler, as he didn't display the slightest sign of being educated. However, the ironmaster told her to have some patience. Just then the door opened and the stranger entered the room. He was now well groomed. He was wearing clothes which belonged to the ironmaster.

The Ironmaster Gets Angry; the Peddler Retaliates

The ironmaster realised that the tramp was no friend of his. The peddler made no attempt to delude them any longer. He explained that he never said to the ironmaster that he was Nils Olof. He had even pleaded and begged for not coming to the manor house. He added that no harm had been done and he could put on his rags and go away. The ironmaster said that the peddler had not been very honest and he would take him to the Sheriff. The peddler got agitated. He said that the world was like a big ratttrap, and some day the ironmaster would also be tempted to touch the bait and would be doomed. The ironmaster started laughing.

Edla Argues on Behalf of the Peddler

The ironmaster asked the peddler to leave. But Edla wanted him to stay back. She felt that they had promised the peddler Christmas cheer, and it would be wrong to send him away. The peddler was surprised by this gesture. Edla further added that the peddler must have been through a bad time, as he was always chased away. He could not even sleep unafraid.

The ironmaster gave in. The peddler was allowed to stay on for Christmas, but the only thing he did was to sleep soundly after that. Once or twice he was woken up to have food but besides that, he only slept. It seemed as though he had never slept as quietly and safely. The ironmaster and Edla gifted him the suit that he was wearing as a Christmas present. She told him that he was welcome to spend even the next Christmas with them. The peddler kept staring at her in boundless amazement.

The Peddler Becomes a Changed Man

The next morning the ironmaster and his daughter went to the church for Christmas service, leaving the peddler at home. They returned home and Edla was very sad. At the church, they had learned that a ratttrap peddler robbed an old crofter who once worked at their Ramsjö Ironworks. The ironmaster was furious.

They thought that by the time they would reach home, the peddler would have escaped with all their silver and other valuables. When they got home, the ironmaster asked the valet if the peddler was still there. The valet informed him that the fellow had left but he had not taken anything with him. Instead, he had left something for Edla. Edla opened the package and found a ratttrap. In the ratttrap were three wrinkled ten kronor notes and a letter.

The peddler had written that since Edla had treated him like a real captain, he also wanted to be nice to her. He wanted the money to be returned to the crofter. He further wrote that he would not have been able to escape the rattrap, if he had not been raised to the status of a captain. He even signed the letter as 'Captain von Stahle'. He was a changed man.

Conclusion of The Rattrap

To sum up, The Rattrap summary, we learn that we can change the world through kindness and compassion; in addition, it teaches us that materialistic things never bring inner joy, only love and respect does.

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NCERT SOLUTIONS

Questions (Page No. 43)

(Understanding The Text)

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

Answer: The peddler was a man who walked around selling small wire rat traps. He was living the lonely and monotonous life of a vagabond. He knocked on the door of the crofter's cottage, which turned out to be an old man without a wife or children. He showed him kindness and hospitality, which the peddler had not anticipated. However, the peddler took his thirty-kroner. As a result, he betrayed the crofter's trust in him.

The ironmaster, remembering Captain Von Stahle as an old acquaintance, extended kindness to him and invited him to spend Christmas Eve with him. But the peddler reasoned that if he said he was the one in the mind of the ironmaster, he would be rewarded with more kroner.

Edla Willmansson, in a very compassionate and friendly manner, asked the peddler to come to her house. He then decided to accept the invitation. However, while riding to the manor's house, he felt very guilty about whatever he had done. As a result, he resolved to correct his error. He accomplished this by leaving Edla a gift containing the thirty kroner he had stolen from the crofter's house. He had written in the note that he would return the crofter's money.

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

Answer: The ironmaster is rash, whereas his daughter is logical, kind, and considerate. In a hazy light, he misidentifies the stranger like an old regimental comrade. He invites him to his home and takes care of his feeding, clothing, and other needs. When he sees him in broad daylight, he accuses him of being dishonest, demands an explanation, and threatens to summon the sheriff. His daughter is more perceptive. She notices the stranger's fear and suspects him of being a thief or a fugitive prisoner. Despite this, she treats him with gentleness, kindness, and friendliness. Even though she is aware of the mistake in identity, she treats him with respect.

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

Answer: The first example is the crofter's hospitality to the peddler. The rattrap peddler, expecting to be denied permission to spend the night in the cottage, is surprised by the crofter's

friendliness. The peddler was also taken aback by the ironmaster's unexpected invitation, which shocked him the next day when he realized his error in recognizing the peddler. Edla's agreement to seek the peddler's presence for Christmas is another unexpected reaction for both the peddler and the ironmaster. The peddler, on the other hand, has an unexpected reaction when he leaves the package and the letter for Edla, expressing gratitude for the girl's hospitality and respect for her.

Question 4. What made the peddler finally change his ways?

Answer: Edla Williamson was friendly with the peddler. She was courteous and considerate to her. When her father was about to kick him out of the house, she prayed for him. Even after learning the truth about the peddler, she continued to entertain him. She greeted him with a Christmas gift and invited him to spend the following Christmas with them. Her love and compassion caused the peddler to communicate with his inner soul, and he changed his ways.

Question 5. How does the metaphor of the rattrap serve to highlight the human predicament?

Answer: Thinking about his rattraps, the peddler concluded that the entire world was nothing more than a giant rattrap. Its sole purpose was to lure people in. It offered riches and joys, shelter and food, heat, and clothing, just as the rattrap decided to offer cheese and pork, and as soon as one allowed oneself to be tempted by the bait, it closed in, ending everything. The peddler became disoriented in the forest after stealing the crofter's money. Then he considered the world and the rattrap once more. It was now encircling him. He had been duped by temptation and had been caught. The forest's undergrowth encircled him like a prison from which he could never escape. The peddler also told the ironmaster that the entire world was a giant rattrap. All of the good things that were offered were nothing more than cheese rind and bits of pork, all of which were designed to entice people into trouble. None of them escaped from one person's jail into the trap one day and the other the next. The rattrap metaphor highlights the human predicament when, in the end, the peddler left the rattrap as a Christmas present and wrote in his letter to Edla that this present was from a rat that would have been caught in this world's rattrap if he had not been treated respectfully and kindly as a captain.

Question 6. 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?

Answer: The peddler does not come across as a humorous person, but there is a subtle sense of humor in the way he sees the world as a giant rattrap. He is ecstatic about this thought because it allows him to think 'ill' of the world that isn't kind to him. It is clear that whenever he is caught off guard, in the web of deception spun by his cunning mind, he hides behind the thought that

the world is a rattrap and he is merely prey. As a result, he lightens the mood and theme of the story and endears us to him.

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