

A Question of Trust

Introduction

This story has been written by Victor Canning. It is about how a thief gets tricked by another thief and ends up in a prison.

Summary

Horace Danby made locks. He was successful in his business. He had two helpers. He was good and respectable, but not completely honest. He loved rare, expensive books. So, he robbed a safe every year. He stole enough to last for twelve months and secretly bought the books he loved through an agent.

This year he had decided to rob the safe at Shotover Grange. The members of the house were in London and the two servants who lived in the house had gone to the movies. He entered the house from behind the garden.

He put on a pair of gloves, took the key from the hook outside the kitchen door and opened the door. Sherry, a small dog began to bark. He calmed the dog. There he saw a great bowl of flowers on the table and felt his nose tickle. He sneezed as he suffered from hay fever. He then arranged his tools and started to break the safe. At first he cut off the wire of the burglar alarm. He came back and sneezed loudly as the smell of the flowers was getting to him. Just then he heard a voice from the doorway. The voice was of a young, pretty lady. She said that she had come back just in time, though she didn't expect to meet a burglar.

Horace wanted to run away. But the lady threatened him that she would call the police. Horace said that he hated prison. He begged her to let him go. The lady told him if he did something for her, she might let him go. She said that she forgot the number to open the safe and she needed her jewels for the party that night.

Horace offered to break open the safe for her. He took off his gloves and opened the safe within an hour. He gave her the jewels and went away happily. On the morning of the third day, a policeman came to Horace's house and arrested him for the jewel robbery at Shotover Grange.

No one believed him when he said that the wife of the owner of the house had asked him to open the safe for her. The wife herself, a gray haired, sharp tongued woman of sixty, said that the story was nonsense.

Horace is now the assistant librarian in the prison. He often thinks of the charming, clever, young lady who was in the same profession as he was and who tricked him. He tends to get very angry when anyone talks about 'honour among thieves'.

Message

The story conveys the message that a dishonest act cannot be justified on any grounds. If a person indulges in a wrongful deed then he is bound to be punished for it.



Extract Based Questions ↘

Read the following extracts carefully and answer the questions that follow:

1. The voice went on, "You can cure it with a special treatment, you know, if you find out just what plant gives you the disease. I think you'd better see a doctor, if you're serious about your work."

(a) The voice is of:

- (i) A young lady (ii) The author
(iii) Horace (iv) Ausable

(b) Was the speaker really caring for the other person?

(c) What is 'the disease'?

- (i) Pneumonia (ii) Hay Fever
(iii) Cancer (iv) None of these

(d) What does 'work' refer to in the last line?

Answers

(a) (i) A young lady

(b) No, the speaker (the lady) was not really caring for the other person. The speaker just wanted to earn the other person's trust and use him for her own wicked intentions.

(c) (ii) Hay Fever

(d) In the last line 'work' refers to 'robbing'.

2. A small dog was lying in the kitchen. It stirred, made a noise, and moved its tail in a friendly way.

(a) What is the name of the dog?

(b) State whether the given statement is True or False. The house is located at Shotover Grange.

(c) Who is there besides the dog? What is his intention?

(d) Give a word similar in meaning to 'Friendly'.

Answers

(a) The name of the dog is Sherry.

(b) True

(c) Horace Danby is there besides the dog. He has entered the house with an intention of robbing the Grange safe.

(d) Amiable/Companionable/Amicable

3. She laughed, and he begged, thinking that he had persuaded her, "Look, I have no right to ask you for anything, but I'm desperate. Let me go and I promise never to do this kind of thing again. I really mean it."

(a) Who is 'she'?

- (i) Mrs Pumphrey (ii) Bholi
(iii) A young lady (iv) Matilda

(b) Give a word that can be used in place of 'persuaded' in the given extract.

(c) Who is 'he'?

- (i) Mr Herriot (ii) Horace Danby
(iii) M. Loisel (iv) Bishamber

(d) Explain the happenings of the extract.

Answers

(a) (iii) A young lady

(b) Convinced

(c) (ii) Horace Danby

(d) The lady thief led Horace into believing that she was the lady of the house. Horace requested her to let him go and promised that he would never steal again.

Short Answer Type Questions ↘

Q 1. 'Horace Danby was a good and respectable citizen.' Explain the statement.

Ans. Horace Danby was a lock maker. His behaviour was extremely good. He was fifty years old. He was unmarried and lived with a housekeeper who worried over his health. He was successful enough at his business to have two helpers. He was considered a respectable citizen. But he was not completely honest, as he broke open a safe every year to fulfil his hobby of buying rare and expensive books.

Q 2. What was Horace Danby's hobby? How did he manage to fulfil it?

OR

Why did Horace Danby steal every year? (CBSE 2019)

Ans. Horace loved rare and expensive books and liked to collect them. This was his hobby. He secretly bought these books through an agent. He did not earn much money from his locks business to be able to pursue his hobby. Therefore, he robbed a safe every year to arrange for money for buying books.

Q 3. How did Horace get entry into the house?

OR

How did Horace enter Shotover Grange? (CBSE 2019)

Ans. Horace had seen the housekeeper hang the key to the kitchen door on a hook outside before going out. He put on a pair of gloves, took the key and opened the door. In this way, he got entry into the house.

Q 4. How did Horace manage the small dog at Shotover Grange?

Ans. When Horace entered the house, he saw a small dog lying in the kitchen. It stirred and made a noise. Horace said, "All right, Sherry". Horace showed him affection and called him by his name. Thus, he managed to calm the dog.

Q 5. Why was it not difficult for Horace to open the safe?

Ans. Horace made locks and was very successful in his business. He had lived with locks and safes all his life. Therefore, it was not difficult for him to open the safe.

Q 6. Why were flowers hindering Horace in his work?

OR

What was Horace Danby suffering from? How did it affect him? (CBSE 2019)

Ans. Horace had hay fever. When he entered Shotover Grange, he found that there was a great bowl of flowers in the drawing room, which also housed the safe. Flowers tickled his nose and made him sneeze twice. The sound of his sneeze made the young lady in red come down the stairs and confront him. In this way, the flowers hindered Horace's work.

Q 7. Why did the lady in red advise Horace about his hay fever? Was she really caring for him?

Ans. The lady in the red told Horace that he can get himself cured of hay fever by a special treatment. It was important to know which plant triggers the disease and then it was possible to cure the disease. She advised him to see a doctor.
No, the lady did not care for Horace. She just wanted to earn his trust and use him for her own wicked intentions.

Q 8. What are the subtle ways in which the lady manages to deceive Horace Danby into thinking that she is the lady of the house? Why doesn't Horace suspect that something is wrong?

Ans. The lady spoke with confidence. She was also familiar with the dog, Sherry. She said that she had returned shortly and was not expecting a thief in the house. She had firmness in her voice. She then threatened him with the idea of 'prison'. Because of her confidence and behaviour, Horace could not suspect that something was wrong. He believed her to be the lady of the house.

Q 9. What does the phrase 'honour among thieves' mean? Why does Horace get angry at this phrase?

(CBSE 2023)

Ans. 'Honour among thieves' means trustworthiness within a group that is not considered trustworthy to outsiders. The lady promised to let Horace go if he would take the jewels out for her. But she didn't keep her promise and three days later Horace was caught for robbery at Shotover Grange. The lady didn't keep 'the honour among the thieves'. That's why Horace gets very angry when anyone talks about 'honour among thieves'.

Q 10. Did Horace get the jewels from the Grange's safe? If not, why did the police arrest him?

Ans. Horace had gone to steal the jewels from Shotover Grange. There a young lady, who was also a thief, tricked him into believing that she was the lady of the house. She threatened Horace to open the safe for her as she had forgotten the numbers to open the safe. She said she had to wear them to a party that night. Horace opened the safe and handed over the jewels to her.

The police arrested him because his fingerprints were found all over the place and no one believed his story, which was termed as an utter 'nonsense'.

Q 11. Horace Danby was a meticulous planner but still he faltered. Where did he go wrong and why?

Ans. Horace Danby was rightly a meticulous planner. He planned carefully each year before stealing. But he faltered. He couldn't see through the intentions of the lady thief at the house. He was so scared of being caught and sent to prison that he blindly believed what the lady said to him. His fear made him blindly trust the lady and was the reason behind the failure of his plan.

Q 12. Do you think Horace Danby was unfairly punished, or that he deserved what he got?

Ans. I think Horace Danby was fairly punished and got what he deserved. It is true that he was not a professional thief and stole only once a year. But, a

thief is a thief, no matter for what purpose or how much amount of money he/she steals.



Long Answer Type Questions

Q 1. 'Though a thief, I am not a man who threatens society', says Horace. What reasons does he give? Do you agree?

Ans. Horace feels that though he is a thief, he is not a man who threatens or harms society in any way. He steals only from those who have a lot of money and he steals for a very good reason. He buys rare and expensive books that he loves with the robbed money. Also, he steals only occasionally.
I do not agree with Horace's theory at all. There is no justification for stealing, no matter what circumstances one may be in. A thief will always remain an anti-social element and a threat to society. There can be no noble intention for committing a crime like stealing.

Q 2. What made Horace Danby commit the robbery at Shotover Grange?

(CBSE 2020)

Ans. Horace Danby made locks for a living. However, he had a hobby to collect expensive and rare books and to pursue this hobby he used to rob a safe every year. This year he has decided to rob Shotover Grange, after reading about it in a magazine. The article had described the house, giving a plan of all the rooms and it even mentioned that the painting hid a safe. On further enquiry, he came to know that there were about fifteen thousand pounds' worth of jewels in the Grange safe. He also came to know that the family had gone to London. All this provided a favourable backdrop and therefore he decided to commit robbery at Shotover Grange.

Q 3. Give a character-sketch of Horace Danby.

(CBSE 2018)

Ans. Horace Danby was an uncommon kind of thief. Everyone thought him to be a good and honest citizen. He was respectable. But he was not completely honest. He loved rare and expensive books. His business of locks did not allow him to pursue his hobby of buying such books. So, he robbed a safe every year. He planned everything before robbery and had not been caught since the last fifteen years. Fifteen years ago he has served his first and only sentence in a prison library and he had despised it. Therefore, he played safe and robbed a place only after making a full proof plan. I also think that he was gullible. The young lady tricked him into believing her and he blindly believed what she said. If he had been smart he would have seen through her story.

Q 4. He gets very angry when anyone talks about 'honour among thieves'. Explain.

(CBSE 2016)

OR

'Honour among thieves' is considered a popular code. Examine 'A Question of Trust' as a story woven around this code.

(CBSE SQP 2022-23)

Ans. Horace Danby got very angry when anyone talked about 'honour among thieves' in jail. It is generally believed that thieves respect and maintain ethics among themselves. But the lady thief didn't do so. She made up a false story before Horace. She impressed upon him that she was the landlady. Danby believed her and opened the safe for her and handed her the jewels. The lady escaped with the jewels while Horace was caught by the police and sentenced to jail as his fingerprints were found all over the place. So, he feels that there is no honour among thieves. Thieves trick one another for their personal benefit.

Q 5. We always make a plan to succeed in our target but sometime it fails, although we are not responsible for that. Explain it with reference to Horace Danby.

Ans. We always make a plan to succeed in our target. Without proper planning, no work can be implemented. But sometimes, we do not get result of our labour and our planning also fails due to bad luck. Here, we can cite the example of Horace Danby. He was an expert with locks. He had committed robbery in the past years successfully. This time also he planned very carefully. He even knew the name of the dog. He entered cautiously. But in the meantime, another young lady came there and he could not understand her trick. She made Horace steal the jewels for her. While opening the safe, Horace became careless and used his bare hands to handle the safe. Three days later, he got arrested by the police. Thus, we find that he could not succeed in his plan that he had formulated quite carefully.

Q 6. 'Horace Danby was good and respectable—but not completely honest.' Why do you think this description is apt for Horace? Why can't he be categorised as a typical thief?

Ans. This description fits well on Horace Danby. Horace enjoys a good reputation in the society he lives in. He had a business making locks. He had two helpers to help him. He was unmarried but his housekeeper worried over his health. He was, in general, considered good and respectable. But, he was not completely honest. He loved rare and expensive books and to arrange money to pursue his hobby, he robbed a safe every year. He cannot be categorised as a typical thief because he stole only once a year. Also, he was a thief by choice and not by compulsion. He also loves reading books. So, due to these reasons, he can't be categorised as a typical thief.

Q 7. Do intentions justify actions? Would you, like Horace Danby, do something wrong if you thought your ends justified the means? Do you think that there are situations in which it is excusable to act less than honestly?

Ans. Yes, it is true that intentions justify actions. But in some cases only intentions cannot justify actions. It is important that right intentions should be accompanied by justifiable means. In the case of Horace Danby, his intention of buying rare and expensive books was commendable but the means that he used to fulfil his hobby was not justified. He robbed people to be able to pursue his hobby and this cannot be justified on any grounds.

I would not like to do wrong in any situation. In my opinion, a wrong act is always considered wrong. It is also true that there are so many situations in life in which it is excusable to act less than honestly. But we must try to follow the right path in all situations.

Q 8. Horace was clever but the lady in red was cleverer. Do you agree with this statement? Justify your answer. (CBSE 2019)

Ans. Yes, I agree with the statement. Horace was definitely clever. For 15 years, he had been able to sustain his front of an honest and hardworking lock maker. But in reality, he was a thief. He used to rob one house every year to fulfil his hobby of buying expensive books. This time he had decided to rob Shotover Grange, after reading about it in a magazine. The family was away at London and there were about fifteen thousand pounds' worth of jewellery in the Grange safe. He planned the robbery very carefully. He even found out the name of the dog. He entered the house cautiously and was in the process of opening the safe when the lady in red made her entry. She led Horace into believing that she was the lady of the house. She spoke with confidence and was also familiar with the dog, Sherry. She said that she had returned shortly and was not expecting a thief in the house. She threatened him with the idea of prison unless Horace opened the safe for her as she had forgotten the numbers to open the safe. She said she had to wear them to a party that night. Horace trusted her blindly, opened the safe and handed over the jewels to her. But the lady in red was a thief herself. She fled with the jewels. The police arrested Horace because his fingerprints were found all over the place and no one believed his story. So, we can say that the lady in red was cleverer than Horace. ●