

Prose - Chapter 4

The Rattrap

Exercise : Solutions of Questions on Page Number : **32**

Question:

Notice these expressions in the text. Infer their meanings from the context.

Answer :

- *keep body and soul together* - to manage to keep alive; to survive
- *hunger gleamed in his eyes* - feeling so hungry that the expression shows on one's face
- *plods along the road* - moving along the road slowly but deliberately, to walk with a heavy feet
- *unwonted joy* - unusual pleasure or happiness
- *impenetrable prison* - impassable confinement
- *nodded a haughty consent* - indifferent agreement
- *eased his way* - moved himself slowly and carefully
- *fallen into a line of thought* - agreement of thoughts
- *things have gone downhill* - to decline or grow worse and worse
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Think as you read : Solutions of Questions on Page Number : **34**



Question:

From where did the peddler get the idea of the world being a rattrap?

Answer :

During one of his usual plodding, the peddler thought on the subject of rattraps. It presented him with the idea of the world being a rattrap and he grew fond of thinking this way.

Question:

Why was he amused by this idea?

Answer :

The peddler was amused by the idea of the world being a giant rattrap because he was never treated kindly by the world. Therefore, he harboured hard feelings for it and loved 'to think ill of it' by comparing it with a giant rattrap.

Question:

Did the peddler expect the kind of hospitality that he received from the crofter?

Answer :

No, the peddler did not expect the kind of hospitality that he received from the crofter. This was because usually



he was greeted by 'sour' and unfriendly faces whenever he knocked on doors and requested for shelter.

Question:

Why was the crofter so talkative and friendly with the peddler?

Answer :

The crofter was a lonely fellow who lived on his own in a little gray cottage by the roadside. He had no wife or children, and craved company and friends. So, one day when the peddler turned up at his doorstep, he was happy to find someone to talk to, to be relieved of his boredom and monotony. This is the reason he was so talkative and friendly with the peddler.

Question:

Why did he show the thirty kroner to the peddler?

Answer :

The crofter was a naive and trusting man who craved company more than anything else. He wanted to share his joy of earning the money with someone. He got his chance when the peddler came along. Moreover, he thought that the peddler did not believe him, so he



showed the peddler the thirty kronor bills that he kept in a leather pouch.

Question:

Did the peddler respect the confidence reposed in him by the crofter?

Answer :

No, the peddler did not respect the confidence reposed in him by the crofter. In fact, he betrayed his trust by robbing the thirty kronors from him.

However, later in the story, his conscience was awakened by his stay with the Willmanssons and he decided to return the money.

Question:

What made the peddler think that he had indeed fallen into a rattrap?

Answer :

After stealing the money, the peddler tried to escape through the forest but soon got lost. Left in despair, he recollected his own thoughts on the world being a giant rattrap. A sudden realisation came to him that he had finally got himself caught in the rattrap because he allowed himself to be tempted by the bait, the thirty



kronor bills. Similarly, on his way to the ironmaster's home, he felt himself caught in the trap.

He was again haunted by such thoughts when the ironmaster, on realising the truth about the peddler, threatened to get him arrested. The rattrap seller expressed himself strongly realising that the worldly bait had, once more, tempted and trapped him.

Question:

Why did the ironmaster speak kindly to the peddler and invite him home?

Answer :

The ironmaster of the Ramsj Åf Å¶ Ironworks spoke kindly to the peddler because he had mistaken him for an old regimental comrade, Captain von Stahle. The ironmaster wanted to help the peddler, not only in regaining his health but also in taking up a new vocation. Moreover, the ironmaster was a lonely fellow who lived with his oldest daughter after the death of his wife and the departure of his sons. As he longed for some company on the Christmas Eve, he invited the peddler to his home.

Question:

Why did the peddler decline the invitation?



Answer :

The peddler was alarmed at the idea of spending the night at the manor of the ironmaster, of the Ramsjö Ironworks, who was an ex-army man. He had not made an attempt to correct the ironmaster when he was mistaken for an old acquaintance.

Moreover, he was anxious about the fact that he had the stolen thirty kronor bills with him, and accepting the invitation "would be like throwing himself voluntarily into the lion's den". Therefore, the peddler thought it better to decline the invitation.

Question:

What made the peddler accept Edla Willmansson's invitation?

Answer :

By his frightened look, Edla 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.

Question:

What doubts did Edla have about the peddler?



Answer :

When Edla went to the iron mill to fetch the peddler, she noticed that he was frightened. She had doubts that the peddler had stolen something or had escaped prison. His appearance and behaviour also left her in doubts whether he was actually an educated man, as claimed by her father.

Question:

When did the ironmaster realise his mistake?

Answer :

The ironmaster realised his mistake the next day when the peddler turned up at breakfast. The valet had bathed the peddler, cut his hair, shaved him and given him clothes. The ironmaster realised that he had been deceived in recognising the person because of the reflection of the furnace, the previous night.

Question:

What did the peddler say in his defence when it was clear that he was not the person the ironmaster had thought he was?

Answer :

To defend himself, the peddler argued that he had never said that he was a captain or the old comrade of the

ironmaster. In fact, he had repeatedly declined the invitation to spend the Christmas at the manor.

Question:

Why did Edla still entertain the peddler even after she knew the truth about him?

Answer :

Edla had a kind and sympathetic heart that was pained by the plight of the poor peddler. She requested her father to allow him to spend one day with them in peace as a respite from the struggle he had to endure round the year. Her principles did not allow her to throw this man out of her house on the Christmas Eve especially when they had already promised him a “Christmas cheer”. Moreover, she had been in high spirits that morning thinking of the ways in which she could help the tramp. Therefore, even after knowing the truth, Edla wanted to entertain the peddler.

Question:

Why was Edla happy to see the gift left by the peddler?

Answer :

Edla showed great trust in him by letting him stay at their manor on the Christmas Eve. But the news about the



robbery had left her dejected. So she was overjoyed when she reached home to find the package and the letter left by the peddler. This gesture of appreciation from the peddler made her happy.

Question:

Why did the peddler sign himself as Captain von Stahle?

Answer :

Throughout his life, the peddler had never known respect. He was always treated coldly by the world. For the first time in his life, he was honoured and respected as if he were a captain. Even after the truth was exposed, the daughter continued to treat him in a similar way. The way he was treated encouraged him to behave in a like manner. He signed the letter as Captain von Stahle so as to underline the impact of Edla's goodness on him.

Question:

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

Answer :

The different ways in which the peddler repaid the three people corresponds to the way he interpreted the



kindness of the three people. The peddler realised that for the crofter it was his craving for company that led him to offer his hospitality. The ironmaster's hospitality apparently is limited to his acquaintances. It was only the daughter who genuinely offered warmth and goodness to the peddler. He was touched by Edla's kindness and it made him want to act differently. He repaid her good treatment with a gesture of true gratitude.

Question:

Discuss the following in groups of four. Each group can deal with one topic. Present the views of your group to the whole class.

The reader's sympathy is with the peddler right from the beginning of the story. Why is this so? Is the sympathy justified?

Answer :

From the beginning, the rattrap seller is shown as a victim of his situation and not a downright evil character. The peddler had to resort to beggary and stealing because his business is not profitable enough to make both ends meet. His condition of penury does not allow him to be fully righteous. Moreover, we find that he lacks friends and guide to steer him in the right path. The sympathy is justified because in the end we find out that the



peddler is capable of appreciating genuine goodness and hospitality. When he is treated with respect and kindness, he reciprocates the same in the best way he can.

Question:

The man selling rattraps is referred to by many terms such as "peddler, stranger" etc. Pick out all such references to him. What does each of these labels indicate of the context or the attitude of the people around him?

Answer :

	Labels	Contexts
1	Peddler	As he peddles or sells the rattraps
2	Vagabond	Used to describe his nomadic lifestyle
3	Stranger	Used to refer to the peddler when he was at the crofter's place, possibly to emphasise the fact that the crofter was compassionate to an unknown man
4	Guest	He is treated with compassion, especially at the ironmaster's house where he was invited to spend the Christmas
5	Intruder	When the peddler trespasses and enters the iron mill
6	Tramp	When the peddler asks for lodgings at the iron mill; also when the



		ironmaster, mistaking him for his old regimental comrade plans of helping him drop his tramp ways and begin a new vocation
7	Ragamuffin	When the ironmaster first notices him wrapped in rags and in the state of utter destitution
8	Old regimental comrade	The ironmaster mistakes him for his old friend when he first meets the peddler at his iron mill
9	Poor hungry wretch	Used only once when the author mentions the fact that Edla was excited about the prospect of getting a chance to help an unfortunate fellow on Christmas
10	Rat	The peddler calls himself a rat and thanks Edla for helping him escape the rattrap with her kindness and compassion

This list may not be an exhaustive one. The students are strongly recommended to read the chapters and find other such terms and phrases on their own.

Question:

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 :

Edla and her father had different natures. She had more convincing power than the father and was able to persuade the peddler to accept the invitation. We also find that the ironmaster's hospitality was limited to his old comrade. But, the daughter was pained by the plight of the peddler and continued to treat him well even after the truth about his identity was revealed. Again, after finding about the robbery of the crofter's money, while the ironmaster was more concerned with the possibility of the peddler robbing them as well, the daughter is more pained by the betrayal of her trust. We also find that while the father was impulsive and reckless in nature, the daughter's behaviour was more mature and controlled.

Question:

The story also focuses on human loneliness and the need to bond with others.

Answer :

The Rattrap deals with the issues of human loneliness and the need to bond with others. Not only the peddler



but also other characters like the crofter, the ironmaster and Edla emphasise this fact.

The peddler's conscience had left him because he had been lonely in his predicament, for a long time. But Edla's kindness and hospitality changed him. The crofter, on the other hand, is a lonely fellow whose craving for company leads him to give shelter to a vagabond, and he ends up getting robbed. Even, the ironmaster and his daughter suffer from loneliness. They crave company on Christmas Eve and are excited when they get the opportunity to serve a guest.

Question:

You came across the words, *plod*, *trudge*, *stagger* in the story. These words indicate movement accompanied by weariness. Find five other such words with a similar meaning.

Answer :

Other words are lurch, stumble, slog, hike, clump, traipse and stomp.

Question:

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



Answer :

The first instance is that of the crofter's hospitality to the peddler. The rattrap peddler, used to being shooed away, was surprised at the friendly behaviour of the crofter. The peddler was also surprised at the sudden invitation given by the ironmaster, who was himself shocked to realise his mistake in recognising the peddler, the next day. Another unexpected reaction, for both the peddler and the ironmaster, is Edla's intervention to seek peddler's presence for Christmas. However, the most unexpected reaction is from the peddler when he leaves the package and the letter for Edla, showing gratitude to the girl's hospitality and respect for him.

Question:

Have you known/heard of an episode where a good deed or an act of kindness has changed a person's view of the world?

Answer :

Directions: Think of any incident or a story where your perspective changes due to some act of kindness from someone. Or, think about someone whose perspective changes because of a good deed by someone else.

Discussing this with the group will help. After finalising the incident, write about the reason the person had a



negative perspective towards life. Then describe the episode where someone bestowed kindness on him. Finally, explain what effect it had on the person on whom it was bestowed and how his perspective of the world changed.

(Directions have been provided for a student's benefit. It is strongly recommended that students prepare the answer on their own.)

Question:

What made the peddler finally change his ways?

Answer :

The experience of the peddler at the manor of the Willmansons made the peddler change his ways. Earlier he had never known a true sympathiser or well-wisher. He had no friend to steer him on the right path. Though the crofter was hospitable to him and even the ironmaster had almost offered him help, they failed to leave any impact on him. It was Edla who, through her genuine care and understanding, was finally able to change the peddler for the better.

Question:

The story is both entertaining and philosophical.



Answer :

The story is told in the form of a fairy tale with a happy ending. The narrative is interesting with many surprises and attention-grabbing dialogues. The twists and the unexpected reactions of the characters often astonish the reader making the story entertaining.

However, the author has carefully managed to weave philosophical elements into the storyline. The rattrap peddler's comparison of the whole world with a giant rattrap makes this an interesting commentary on how such people end up getting trapped in the giant chasm. The story also makes an observation on the inherent goodness of people. It also showcases how goodness and kindness shown by some people can change others' perspective.

Question:

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

Answer :

The metaphor of the rattrap signifies that the world exists only to trap people by setting baits for them. Whenever someone is tempted by the luxuries, he ends up being caught in a dangerous trap. The author, thus, makes a much deeper comment on the woeful plight of those in pursuit of the worldly pleasures, which often lead them to unfortunate situations. The story helps in realising the



importance of general goodness and kindness. The peddler is saved from the snare of the huge rattrap called world only when he appreciates the kindness to him by Edla.

Question:

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 doesn't come across as a humorous person, although one can locate a subtle sense of humour in the way he thinks about the world as being a giant rattrap. He is singularly pleased by this thought of his because it provides him with the opportunity of thinking 'ill' of the world that is not kind to him. It is clearly visible that whenever he gets caught unaware, in the web of deceit spun by his scheming mind, he hides behind the thought that the world is a rattrap and he merely a prey. Thus, he lightens the mood and theme of the story and makes us endear him.

Thinking about languagenoticing form : Solutions of Questions on Page Number : 44



Question:

Notice the words in bold in the following sentence.

"The fire boy shovelled charcoal into the maw of the furnace with a great deal of clatter". This is a phrase that is used in the specific context of an iron plant.

Pick out other such phrases and words from the story that are peculiar to the terminology of ironworks.

Answer :

Other such phrases could be as follows:

1. 'a hard regular thumping'
2. 'hammer strokes'
3. 'a large plant with smelter, rolling mill and forge'
4. 'pig iron'
5. 'coal dust'
6. 'put on the anvil'

Question:

1. He made them himself at odd moments.
2. He raised himself.
3. He had let himself be fooled by a bait and had been caught.
4. ... a day may come when you yourself may want to get a big piece of pork.

Notice the way in which these reflexive pronouns have been used (pronoun + self)



In 1 and 4 the reflexive pronouns "himself" and "yourself" are used to convey emphasis. In 2 and 3 the reflexive pronoun is used in place of personal pronoun to signal that it refers to the same subject in the sentence.

Pick out other examples of the use of reflexive pronouns from the story and notice how they are used.

Answer :

Examples	Usage
“...would be like throwing himself voluntarily into the lion's den”	used in place of personal pronoun to signal that it refers to the same subject in the sentence
“...except my oldest daughter and my self ”	used in place of personal pronoun to signal that it refers to the same subject in the sentence
“...he laughed to himself .”	used in place of personal pronoun to signal that it refers to the same subject in the sentence
“...better powers of persuasion than he himself ”	used to convey emphasis
“stretched himself out on the	used in place of personal pronoun to signal that it

floor”	refers to the same subject in the sentence
“He could not bring himself to oppose her.”	used to convey emphasis

Question:

Mjolis is a card game of Sweden.

Name a few indoor games played in your region. 'Chopar' could be an example.

Answer :

Some indoor games are chess, ludo, table tennis, playing cards, billiards, etc.

Question:

A crofter is a person who rents or owns a small farm especially in Scotland. Think of other uncommon terms for 'a small farmer' including those in your language.

Answer :

Some other terms are peasant, plower, cultivator, krishak, kisan etc