

## THE RATTRAP

About the author

Selma Lagerlof (1858-1940) was a Swedish writer whose stories have been translated into many languages. A universal theme runs through all of them — a belief that the essential goodness in a human being can be awakened through understanding and love. This story is set amidst the mines of Sweden, rich in iron ore, which figure large in the history and legends of that country. The story is told somewhat in the manner of a fairy tale.

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

keep body and soul together, hunger gleamed in his eyes

plods along the road, unwonted joy

impenetrable prison, nodded a haughty consent

eased his way, fallen into a line of thought

things have gone downhill

Once upon a time there was a man who went around selling small rattraps of wire. He made them himself at odd moments, from the material he got by begging in the stores or at the big farms. But even so, the business was not especially profitable, so he had to resort to both begging and petty thievery to keep body and soul together. Even so, his clothes were in rags, his cheeks were sunken, and hunger gleamed in his eyes.

No one can imagine how sad and monotonous life can appear to such a vagabond, who plods along the road, left to his own meditations. But one day this man had fallen into a line of thought, which really seemed to him entertaining. He had naturally been thinking of his rattraps when suddenly he was struck by the idea that the whole world about him — the whole world with its lands and seas, its cities and villages — was nothing but a big rattrap. It had never existed for any other purpose than to set baits for people. It offered riches and joys, shelter and food, heat and clothing, exactly as the rattrap offered cheese and pork, and as soon as anyone let himself be tempted to touch the bait, it closed in on him, and then everything came to an end.

The world had, of course, never been very kind to him, so it gave him unwonted joy to think ill of it in this way. It became a cherished pastime of his, during many dreary ploddings, to think of people he knew who had let themselves be caught in the dangerous snare, and of others who were still circling around the bait.

One dark evening as he was trudging along the road he caught sight of a little gray cottage by the roadside, and he knocked on the door to ask shelter for the night. Nor was he refused. Instead of the sour faces which ordinarily met him, the owner, who was an old man without wife or child, was happy to get someone to talk to in his loneliness. Immediately he put the porridge pot on the fire and gave him supper; then he carved off such a big slice from his tobacco roll that it was enough both for the stranger's pipe and his own. Finally he got out an old pack of cards and played 'mjolis' with his guest until bedtime.

The old man was just as generous with his confidences as with his porridge and tobacco. The guest was informed at once that in his days of prosperity his host had been a crofter at Ramsjo Ironworks and had worked on the land. Now that he was no longer able to do day labour, it was his cow which supported him. Yes, that bossy was extraordinary. She could give milk for the creamery every day, and last month he had received all of thirty kronor in payment.

The stranger must have seemed incredulous, for the old man got up and went to the window, took down a leather pouch which hung on a nail in the very window frame, and picked out three wrinkled ten-kronor bills. These he held up before the eyes of his guest, nodding knowingly, and then stuffed them back into the pouch.

The next day both men got up in good season. The crofter was in a hurry to milk his cow, and the other man probably thought he should not stay in bed when the head of the house had gotten up. They left the cottage at the same time. The crofter locked the door and put the key in his pocket. The man with the rattraps said good bye and thank you, and thereupon each went his own way. But half an hour later the rattrap peddler stood again before the door. He did not try to get in, however. He only went up to the window, smashed a pane, stuck in his hand, and got hold of the pouch with the thirty kronor. He took the money and thrust it into his own pocket. Then he hung the leather pouch very carefully back in its place and went away.

As he walked along with the money in his pocket he felt quite pleased with his smartness. He realised, of course, that at first he dared not continue on the public highway, but must turn off the road, into the woods. During the first hours this caused him no difficulty. Later in the day it became worse, for it was a big and confusing forest which he had gotten into. He tried, to be sure, to walk in a definite direction, but the paths twisted back and forth so strangely! He walked and walked without coming to the end of the wood, and finally he realised that he had only been walking around in the same part of the forest. All at once he recalled his thoughts about the world and the rattrap. Now his own turn had come. He had let himself be fooled by a bait and had been caught. The whole forest, with its trunks and branches, its thickets and fallen logs, closed in upon him like an impenetrable prison from which he could never escape.

It was late in December. Darkness was already descending over the forest. This increased the danger, and increased also his gloom and despair. Finally he saw no way out, and he sank down on the ground, tired to death, thinking that his last moment had come. But just as he laid his head on the ground, he heard a sound—a hard regular thumping. There was no doubt as to what that was. He raised himself. “Those are the hammer strokes from an iron mill”, he thought. “There must be people near by”. He summoned all his strength, got up, and staggered in the direction of the sound.

The Ramsjo Ironworks, which are now closed down, were, not so long ago, a large plant, with smelter, rolling mill, and forge. In the summertime long lines of heavily loaded barges and scows slid down the canal, which led to a large inland lake, and in the wintertime the roads near the mill were black from all the coal dust which sifted down from the big charcoal crates.

During one of the long dark evenings just before Christmas, the master smith and his helper sat in the dark forge near the furnace waiting for the pig iron, which had been put in the fire, to be ready to put on the anvil. Every now and then one of them got up to stir the glowing mass with a long iron bar, returning in a few moments, dripping with perspiration, though, as was the custom, he wore nothing but a long shirt and a pair of wooden shoes. All the time there were many sounds to be heard in the forge. The big bellows groaned and the burning coal cracked. The fire boy shovelled charcoal into the maw of the furnace with a great deal of clatter. Outside roared the waterfall, and a sharp north wind whipped the rain against the brick-tiled roof.

It was probably on account of all this noise that the blacksmith did not notice that a man had opened the gate and entered the forge, until he stood close up to the furnace. Surely it was nothing unusual for poor vagabonds without any better shelter for the night to be attracted to the forge by the glow of light which escaped through the sooty panes, and to come in to warm themselves in front of the fire. The blacksmiths glanced only casually and indifferently at the intruder. He looked the way people of his type usually did, with a long beard, dirty, ragged, and with a bunch of rattaps dangling on his chest. He asked permission to stay, and the master blacksmith nodded a haughty consent without honouring him with a single word.

The tramp did not say anything, either. He had not come there to talk but only to warm himself and sleep. In those days the Ramsjö iron mill was owned by a very prominent ironmaster, whose greatest ambition was to ship out good iron to the market. He watched both night and day to see that the work was done as well as possible, and at this very moment he came into the forge on one of his nightly rounds of inspection. Naturally the first thing he saw was the tall ragamuffin who had eased his way so close to the furnace that steam rose from his wet rags. The ironmaster did not follow the example of the blacksmiths, who had hardly deigned to look at the stranger. He walked close up to him, looked him over very carefully, then tore off his slouch hat to get a better view of his face. "But of course it is you, Nils Olof!" he said. "How you do look!"

The man with the rattaps had never before seen the ironmaster at Ramsjö and did not even know what his name was. But it occurred to him that if the fine gentleman thought he was an old acquaintance, he might perhaps throw him a couple of kronor. Therefore he did not want to undeceive him all at once. "Yes, God knows things have gone downhill with me", he said. "You should not have resigned from the regiment", said the ironmaster. "That was the mistake. If only I had still been in the service at the time, it never would have happened.

Well, now of course you will come home with me." To go along up to the manor house and be received by the owner like an old regimental comrade — that, however, did not please the tramp. "No, I couldn't think of it!" he said, looking quite alarmed.

He thought of the thirty kronor. To go up to the manor house would be like throwing himself voluntarily into the lion's den. He only wanted a chance to sleep here in the forge and then sneak away as inconspicuously as possible. The ironmaster assumed that he felt embarrassed because of his miserable clothing. "Please don't think that I have such a fine home that you cannot show yourself there", He said... "Elizabeth is dead, as you may already have heard. My boys are abroad, and there is no one at home except my oldest daughter and myself. We were just saying that it was too bad we didn't have any company for Christmas. Now come along with me and help us make the Christmas food disappear a little faster."

But the stranger said no, and no, and again no, and the ironmaster saw that he must give in. "It looks as though Captain von Stahle preferred to stay with you tonight, Stjernström", he said to the master blacksmith, and turned on his heel. But he laughed to himself as he went away, and the blacksmith, who knew him, understood very well that he had not said his last word.

It was not more than half an hour before they heard the sound of carriage wheels outside the forge, and a new guest came in, but this time it was not the ironmaster. He had sent his daughter, apparently hoping that she would have better powers of persuasion than he himself. She entered, followed by a valet, carrying on his arm a big fur coat. She was not at all pretty, but seemed modest and quite shy. In the forge everything was just as it had been earlier in the evening. The master blacksmith and his apprentice still sat on their bench, and iron and charcoal still glowed in the furnace. The stranger had stretched himself out on the floor and lay with a piece of pig iron under his head and his hat pulled down over his eyes. As soon as the young girl caught sight of him, she went up and lifted his hat. The

man was evidently used to sleeping with one eye open. He jumped up abruptly and seemed to be quite frightened.

"My name is Edla Willmansson," said the young girl. "My father came home and said that you wanted to sleep here in the forge tonight, and then I asked permission to come and bring you home to us. I am so sorry, Captain, that you are having such a hard time." She looked at him compassionately, with her heavy eyes, and then she noticed that the man was afraid. "Either he has stolen something or else he has escaped from jail", she thought, and added quickly, "You may be sure, Captain, that you will be allowed to leave us just as freely as you came. Only please stay with us over Christmas Eve." She said this in such a friendly manner that the rattrap peddler must have felt confidence in her. "It would never have occurred to me that you would bother with me yourself, miss," he said. "I will come at once."

He accepted the fur coat, which the valet handed him with a deep bow, threw it over his rags, and followed the young lady out to the carriage, without granting the astonished blacksmiths so much as a glance. But while he was riding up to the manor house he had evil forebodings.

"Why the devil did I take that fellow's money?" he thought. "Now I am sitting in the trap and will never get out of it."

The next day was Christmas Eve, and when the ironmaster came into the dining room for breakfast he probably thought with satisfaction of his old regimental comrade whom he had run across so unexpectedly. "First of all we must see to it that he gets a little flesh on his bones," he said to his daughter, who was busy at the table. "And then we must see that he gets something else to do than to run around the country selling rattraps." "It is queer that things have gone downhill with him as badly as that," said the daughter. "Last night I did not think there was anything about him to show that he had once been an educated man." "You must have patience, my little girl," said the father. "As soon as he gets clean and dressed up, you will see something different. Last night he was naturally embarrassed. The tramp manners will fall away from him with the tramp clothes."

Just as he said this the door opened and the stranger entered. Yes, now he was truly clean and well dressed. The valet had bathed him, cut his hair, and shaved him. Moreover he was dressed in a good-looking suit of clothes which belonged to the ironmaster. He wore a white shirt and a starched collar and whole shoes. But although his guest was now so well groomed, the ironmaster did not seem pleased. He looked at him with puckered brow, and it was easy to understand that when he had seen the strange fellow in the uncertain reflection from the furnace he might have made a mistake, but that now, when he stood there in broad daylight, it was impossible to mistake him for an old acquaintance.

"What does this mean?" he thundered. The stranger made no attempt to dissimulate. He saw at once that the splendour had come to an end. "It is not my fault, sir," he said. "I never pretended to be anything but a poor trader, and I pleaded and begged to be allowed to stay in the forge. But no harm has been done. At worst I can put on my rags again and go away".

"Well," said the ironmaster, hesitating a little, "it was not quite honest, either. You must admit that, and I should not be surprised if the sheriff would like to have something to say in the matter." The tramp took a step forward and struck the table with his fist. "Now I am going to tell you, Mr Ironmaster, how things are," he said. "This whole world is nothing but a big rattrap. All the good things that are offered to you are nothing but cheese rinds and bits of pork, set out to drag a poor fellow into trouble. And if the sheriff comes now and locks me up for this, then you, Mr Ironmaster, must remember that a day may come when you yourself may want to get a big piece of pork, and then you will get caught in the trap." The ironmaster began to laugh.

"That was not so badly said, my good fellow. Perhaps we should let the sheriff alone on Christmas Eve. But now get out of here as fast as you can." But just as the man was opening the door, the daughter said, "I think he ought to stay with us today. I don't want him to go." And with that she went and closed the door. "What in the world are you doing?" said the father.

The daughter stood there quite embarrassed and hardly knew what to answer. That morning she had felt so happy when she thought how homelike and Christmassy she was going to make things for the poor hungry wretch. She could not get away from the idea all at once, and that was why she had interceded for the vagabond. "I am thinking of this stranger here," said the young girl. "He walks and walks the whole year long, and there is probably not a single place in the whole country where he is welcome and can feel at home. Wherever he turns he is chased away. Always he is afraid of being arrested and cross-examined. I should like to have him enjoy a day of peace with us here — just one in the whole year."

The ironmaster mumbled something in his beard. He could not bring himself to oppose her. "It was all a mistake, of course," she continued. "But anyway I don't think we ought to chase away a human being whom we have asked to come here, and to whom we have promised Christmas cheer." "You do preach worse than a parson," said the ironmaster. "I only hope you won't have to regret this." The young girl took the stranger by the hand and led him up to the table.

"Now sit down and eat," she said, for she could see that her father had given in. The man with the rattraps said not a word; he only sat down and helped himself to the food. Time after time he looked at the young girl who had interceded for him. Why had she done it? What could the crazy idea be? After that, Christmas Eve at Ramsjö passed just as it always had. The stranger did not cause any trouble because he did nothing but sleep. The whole forenoon he lay on the sofa in one of the guest rooms and slept at one stretch. At noon they woke him up so that he could have his share of the good Christmas fare, but after that he slept again. It seemed as though for many years he had not been able to sleep as quietly and safely as here at Ramsjö. In the evening, when the Christmas tree was lighted, they woke him up again, and he stood for a while in the drawing room, blinking as though the candlelight hurt him, but after that he disappeared again. Two hours later he was aroused once more. He then had to go down into the dining room and eat the Christmas fish and porridge.

As soon as they got up from the table he went around to each one present and said thank you and good night, but when he came to the young girl she gave him to understand that it was her father's intention that the suit which he wore was to be a Christmas present — he did not have to return it; and if he wanted to spend next Christmas Eve in a place where he could rest in peace, and be sure that no evil would befall him, he would be welcomed back again. The man with the rattraps did not answer anything to this. He only stared at the young girl in boundless amazement. The next morning the ironmaster and his daughter got up in good season to go to the early Christmas service. Their guest was still asleep, and they did not disturb him.

When, at about ten o'clock, they drove back from the church, the young girl sat and hung her head even more dejectedly than usual. At church she had learned that one of the old crofters of the ironworks had been robbed by a man who went around selling rattraps.

"Yes, that was a fine fellow you let into the house," said her father. "I only wonder how many silver spoons are left in the cupboard by this time." The wagon had hardly stopped at the front steps when the ironmaster asked the valet whether the stranger was still there. He added that he had heard at church that the man was a thief. The valet answered that the fellow had gone and that he had not taken anything with him at all.

On the contrary, he had left behind a little package which Miss Willmansson was to be kind enough to accept as a Christmas present. The young girl opened the package, which was so badly done up that

the contents came into view at once. She gave a little cry of joy. She found a small rattrap, and in it lay three wrinkled ten kronor notes. But that was not all.

In the rattrap lay also a letter written in large, jagged characters —“Honoured and noble Miss,“Since you have been so nice to me all day long, as if I was a captain, I want to be nice to you, in return, as if I was a real captain — for I do not want you to be embarrassed at this Christmas season by a thief; but you can give back the money to the old man on the roadside, who has the money pouch hanging on the window frame as a bait for poor wanderers.“The rattrap is a Christmas present from a rat who would have been caught in this world’s rattrap if he had not been raised to captain, because in that way he got power to clear himself.

“Written with friendship and high regard,

“Captain von Stahle.”

## **LISTEN TO THE STORY**

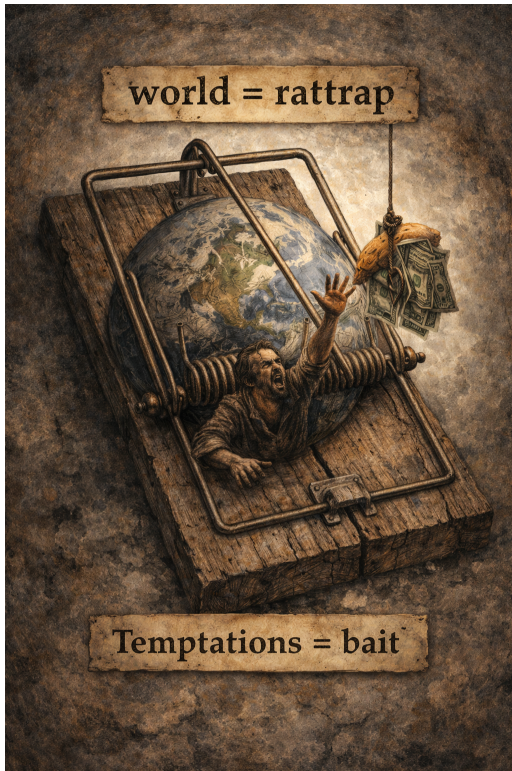
Click on the link below and hear the story being read. Pay attention to the pronunciation of the words.

[Class 12 | The Rattrap | Selma Lagerlof | Audiobook](#)

## **PEDDLER WITH RATTRAPS**



## WORLD IS A RATTRAP



## AT THE IRON MILL



## VOCABULARY

1. **Resort** : to do something bad or unpleasant because you feel you have no choice.  
After not sleeping for three nights, I had to **resort** to taking a sleeping pill.
2. **Petty** : small and unimportant. He didn't  
want to get involved with the **petty** details.
3. **Vagabond** : a person without a home or a job who keeps travelling from one place to another.  
A **vagabond** does not find shelter easily anywhere.
4. **Plods** : to walk slowly and in a heavy or tired way. The tired  
farmer slowly **plods** his way home.
5. **Unwonted** : unusual, out of the ordinary. He  
spoke with **unwonted** enthusiasm.
6. **Cherished** : to love someone/something and look after them carefully. My aunt  
makes me feel very **cherished** and loved.
7. **Dreary** : not at all interesting or attractive; boring. We  
stayed indoors to avoid the **dreary** winter weather.
8. **Snare** : a device (trap) used to catch birds or small animals or more broadly , any  
trap or deceptive situation . City life can  
be full of **snares** for young people .
9. **Trudging** : to walk with slow , heavy steps , for example because you are very tired.  
The kids were **trudging** through the thick snow to get to school.
10. **Supper** : the evening meal, usually an informal one eaten at home. We  
usually have **supper** at 7.
11. **Crofter** : a person who lives and works on a traditional small scale agricultural unit or  
farm. While visiting rural  
Scotland, I met a **crofter** who had many interesting experiences to share.
12. **Incredulous** : not willing or not able to believe something. He gave  
me an **incredulous** look when I told him that he had won the lottery.
13. **Thrust** : to push somebody/something suddenly or violently; to move quickly and  
suddenly in a particular direction. The man  
**thrust** his hands deeper into his pockets.

- 14. Thickets** : a dense, tangled growth of bushes, shrubs, or small trees growing closely together. The frightened  
deers hid deep within the safety of the **thickets** .
- 15. Impenetrable** : impossible to enter or go through. The jungle  
was **impenetrable** .
- 16. Despair** : the state of having lost all hope. I felt  
like giving up in **despair** .
- 17. Thumping** : a heavy, dull or resounding sound or impact. The  
**thumping** of footsteps announced the arrival of the football team.
- 18. Summoned** : to order a person to come to a place. The boys  
were **summoned** to the Principal's office.
- 19. Staggered** : to walk with short steps as if you could fall at any moment. He  
**staggered** across the finishing line and collapsed.
- 20. Smelter** : an industrial facility or machine used to extract metal from its raw ore.  
The temperatures inside a **smelter** go very high.
- 21. Forge** : a place where objects are made by heating and shaping metal. A  
blacksmith works in a **forge**.
- 22. Anvil** : an iron block on which a blacksmith puts hot pieces of metal before shaping  
them with a hammer. The blacksmith  
heated the horseshoe in the furnace before shaping it on the **anvil** .
- 23. Bellows** : a device used to produce a focused stream of air. The most  
common place to find a **bellows** is in a blacksmith's shop.
- 24. Maw** : a dark endless opening. We  
watched the coal fall into the fiery **maw** of the furnace.
- 25. Clatter** : to make or cause something hard to make a series of short loud repeated  
sounds. She heard the  
**clatter** of pots and pans in the kitchen.
- 26. Sooty** : something covered with the dark, blackish colour of soot. After the  
storm, the inside of the fireplace was **sooty** .
- 27. Intruder** : a person who enters a place without permission and often secretly. The  
security alarm went off when an **intruder** tried to climb over the back fence.
- 28. Consent** : to agree to something, to allow something to happen. The  
child's parents had to give their **consent** for the operation.

29. **Prominent** : important or famous. The church is the most **prominent** feature of the town.
30. **Ragamuffin** : a person who is dressed in ragged, or ill - fitting clothes and has a dirty appearance. The **ragamuffin** went from house to house, begging for food.
31. **Deigned** : to do something although you think you are too important to do it. After hours of silence, she finally **deigned** to reply to his text.
32. **Slouch hat** : a soft, wide - brimmed cloth hat. I noticed a tall man wearing a khaki **slouch hat** on his head.
33. **Acquaintance**: a person that you know but who is not a close friend. I was given your name by an **acquaintance** .
34. **Undeceive** : to free someone from false belief or misunderstanding. I hated to **undeceive** her, but the tickets she bought online were actually a scam.
35. **Downhill** : it refers to a gradual decline in quality or condition. The company's finances went **downhill** after the merger.
36. **Inconspicuously** : doing something in a way that avoids attracting attention. She slipped into the meeting **inconspicuously** .
37. **Persuasion** : the act of persuading someone to do something. It took a lot of **persuasion** to get Anjali to agree.
38. **Valet** : a personal attendant. A **valet** is a luxury few can afford .
39. **Astonished** : to be suddenly surprised . I was **astonished** by the decision .
40. **Forebodings** : a strong feeling that danger or trouble is coming . She was overcome by dark **forebodings** .
41. **Queer** : strange. It was **queer** to see so many clowns in one place.
42. **Puckered brow** : a wrinkled forehead, often created by pulling the eyebrows downward and inward towards the centre of the face. A **puckered brow** on my father's face usually means that he is working on a complex puzzle.
43. **Thundered** : to make a loud deep noise like thunder. Traffic **thundered** across the bridge.

- 44. Dissimulate** : to hide your true feelings, intentions or character. She tried to **dissimulate** her disappointment by smiling politely and congratulating the winner.
- 45. Splendour**: very impressive beauty. We visited Agra just to witness the **splendour** of the Taj.
- 46. Wretch** : a poor, unhappy person. The poor **wretch** was clearly starving.
- 47. Interceded** : to intervene, plead, or act as a mediator on behalf of another person. The police **interceded** in the violent street fight, preventing further injuries.
- 48. Mumbled** : to speak quietly without opening your mouth properly, so that people cannot hear the words. He **mumbled** something under his breath and walked away.
- 49. Christmas fare** : the traditional food or drinks consumed during a holiday season. The hotel is serving a special menu featuring traditional **Christmas fare** .
- 50. Aroused** : to be awakened. My neighbour was **aroused** from a deep sleep by a loud noise.
- 51. Boundless** : having no limit. My dog has **boundless** energy.
- 52. Dejectedly** : doing something in a sad, depressed or hopeless manner. He stared **dejectedly** at his feet after losing the match.

## SUMMARY

The story was about a poor, lonely peddler who sold small rattraps. He lived a sad life, moving from place to place and often stole to survive. He developed a strange philosophy which he found comforting in his loneliness .He believed that the whole world was like a giant rat trap. Just as cheese lures rats into a trap, riches,joys, food, and shelter etc. tempt people. As soon as anyone lets himself be tempted to touch the bait, the trap shuts and there is no escape.

One day, the peddler took shelter at the house of an old crofter who treated him kindly and shared his simple home and food . However, the peddler betrayed his host by stealing the crofter's money and running away.

While escaping into the forest, he got lost and realised that he had fallen into his own "rat trap". He had let himself be fooled by a bait and had been caught. Fortunately , he reached an iron mill and decided to take shelter there for the night. In the dim light,the owner mistakenly thought that the

peddler was an old army colleague, Captain Von Srahle. He assumed that the Captain had fallen into hard ,and invited him home. When the peddler kept resisting, the ironmaster sent his daughter to persuade the vagabond to come home. He was addressed respectfully as 'Captain'.

Unfortunately, when the Ironmaster looked at the peddler carefully in the morning he realised the peddler was not an old army colleague. He was in fact, just a peddler, a vagabond. He also then discovered that the peddler was a thief. He wanted to inform the Sheriff. The peddler convinced the Ironmaster not to report him to the Sheriff.

At the manor, the ironmaster's daughter, Edla, treated him with kindness and respect, despite knowing he is not who her father thinks he is. Touched by her compassion, the peddler underwent a change of heart. He asked her to return the money to the crofter.

The climax of the story is in the following lines from a letter the peddler wrote to Elda, and then quietly left the manor.

" Since you have been so nice to me all day long, as if I was actually a captain, I want to be nice to you, in return, **as if I was a real captain**-for I do not want you to be embarrassed at this Christmas season by a thief; but you can give back the money to the old man on roadside."

**"The rattrap is a Christmas present from a rat who would have been caught in this world's rattrap if he had not been raised to captain, because in that way he got power to clear himself."**

He signed off as "Captain Von Stahle,"

This is the transformative power of kindness and faith.

### **Key Themes:**

- The world as a metaphorical "rat trap"
- The power of kindness and compassion to transform people
- Redemption and moral awakening
- Loneliness and the human need for dignity

### **Conclusion:**

The story shows that while people may fall into the "trap" of greed , genuine kindness and understanding can help them escape from the trap and become better human beings.

## **QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**

### **THINK AS YOU READ**

**Q1. From where did the peddler get the idea of the world being a rattrap?**

**Q2. Why was he amused by this idea?**

Q3. Did the peddler expect the kind of hospitality that he received from the crofter?

Q4. Why was the crofter so talkative and friendly with the peddler?

Q5. Why did he show the thirty kronor to the peddler?

Q6. Did the peddler respect the confidence reposed in him by the crofter?

### THINK AS YOU READ

Q1. What made the peddler think that he had indeed fallen into a rattrap?

Q2. Why did the ironmaster speak kindly to the peddler and invite him home?

Q3. Why did the peddler decline the invitation?

### THINK AS YOU READ

Q1. What made the peddler accept Edla Willmansson's invitation?

Q2. What doubts did Edla have about the peddler?

Q3. When did the ironmaster realise his mistake?

Q4. How did the peddler defend himself against not having revealed his true identity?

Q5. Why did Edla still entertain the peddler even after she knew the truth about him?

## THINK AS YOU READ

Q1. Why was Edla happy to see the gift left by the peddler?

Q2. Why did the peddler sign himself as Captain von Stahle?

## UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

Q1. How does the peddler interpret the acts of kindness and hospitality shown by the crofter, the iron master and his daughter?

Q2. 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?

Q3. The story has many instances of unexpected reactions from the characters to others' behaviour. Pick out instances of these surprises.

Q4. What made the peddler finally change his ways?

Q5. How does the metaphor of the rattrap serve to highlight the human predicament?

Q6. 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?

## TALKING ABOUT THE TEXT

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

Q1. The reader's sympathy is with the peddler right from the beginning of the story. Why is this so? Is the sympathy justified?

Q2. The story also focuses on human loneliness and the need to bond with others.

Q3. 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?

Q4. The story is both entertaining and philosophical. Discuss.

## WORKING WITH WORDS

Q1. 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?

Q2. 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.

## THINKING ABOUT LANGUAGE

Q1. Notice the words in bold in the following sentence:

"The fire boy shovelled charcoal in 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.

Q2. "Mjolis" is a card game from Sweden.

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

Q3. 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.

## MORE QUESTIONS SOLVED

### REFERENCE TO CONTEXT

Read the extract and answer the questions:

Q.1. ... it was a big and confusing forest which he had gotten into. He tried, to be sure, to walk in a definite direction, but the paths twisted back and forth so strangely! He walked and walked without coming to the end of the wood, and finally he realised that he had only been walking around in the same part of the forest. All at once he recalled his thoughts about the world and the rattrap. Now his own turn had come. He had let himself be fooled by a bait and had been caught. The whole forest, with its trunks and branches, its thickets and fallen logs, closed in upon him like an impenetrable prison from which he could never escape.

**(A)** How would you describe the tone of the above paragraph?

- (i) mysterious
- (ii) ominous, sad
- (iii) thoughtful
- (iv) philosophical

**(B)** What bait was used to fool the peddler?

- (i) He had chosen to take the safe forest route.
- (ii) He had decided to avoid the highway.
- (iii) He had stolen money from the trusting crofter.
- (iv) He didn't realise the power of his 'rattrap' philosophy.

**(C)** The result of 'his own turn' having come was that the peddler had\_\_\_\_\_.

**(D)** The literary device in the line 'The whole forest, with its.....closed upon him like an impenetrable prison' is a \_\_\_\_\_.

Q.2. "Since you have been so nice to me all day long, as if I was a captain, I want to be nice to you, in return, as if I was a real captain — for I do not want you to be embarrassed at this Christmas season by a thief; but you can give back the money to the old man on the roadside, who has the money pouch hanging on the window frame as a bait for poor wanderers. "The rattrap is a Christmas present from a rat who would have been caught in this world's rattrap if he had not been raised to captain, because in that way he got power to clear himself.

"Written with friendship and high regard,

"Captain von Stahle."

**(A)** According to the extract, the peddler did not have which of the following qualities?

- ( i ) indebtedness
- (ii) pride
- (iii) self-pity
- (iv) self-awareness

**(B)** Why did the peddler gift a rat trap as a Christmas gift?

- (i) He did so because their house had lots of rats.
- (ii) It was the only thing that the peddler had and it also represented his becoming an honest person.
- (iii) The peddler thought it would remind Edla of him.
- (iv) The peddler thought it would make the Ironmaster feel guilty about his behaviour.

**(C)** Who had raised the peddler to the status of a 'captain'?

- (i) The old crafter.
- (ii) The mill owner.
- (iii) Nils Olof.
- (iv) Edla Willmansson.

**(D)** What lesson does this extract teach us?

- (i) It teaches us that we should not get trapped in a rattrap.
- (ii) It teaches us that we must not betray someone's trust in us.
- (iii) It teaches us that kindness and compassion has the power to change people.
- (iv) It teaches us to be careful of whom we trust.

## **SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS**

**Q1. How did the peddler of rattraps manage to survive?**

**Q2. How did the peddler look? Was he different from people of his type?**

**Q3. Who was the owner of the Ramsjo Iron Mill? Why did he come to the forge that night?**

**Q4. What did the ironmaster notice in the forge? How did he react then?**

## **LONG ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS**

**Q1. What impression do you form of Edla on reading the story 'The Rattrap' ?**