**The Rattrap**

**Q1. From where did the peddler get the idea of the world being a rattrap?**  
**Ans:** The peddler had been thinking of his rattraps when suddenly he was struck by the idea that the whole world was nothing but a big rattrap. It existed only to set baits for people. It offered riches and joys, shelter and food, heat and clothing in the same manner as the rattrap offered cheese and pork. As soon as someone let himself be tempted to touch the bait, it closed in on him, and then everything came to an end.

**Q2. Why was he amused by this idea?**  
**Ans:** His own life was sad and monotonous. He walked laboriously from place to place. The world had never been kind to him. So, during his gloomy ploddings, this idea became his favourite pastime. He was amused how people let themselves be caught in the dangerous snare and how others were still circling around the bait.

**Q3. Did the peddler expect the kind of hospitality that he received from the crofter?**  
**Ans:** The crofter served him porridge for supper and tobacco for his pipe. He also played a game of cards with him till bed time. This hospitality was unexpected as people usually made sour faces when the peddler asked for shelter.

**Q4. Why was the crofter so talkative and friendly with the peddler?**  
**Ans:** The crofter’s circumstances and temperament made him so talkative and friendly with the peddler. 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.

**Q5. Why did he show the thirty kronor to the peddler?**  
**Ans:** 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 assure his guest of the truth he showed the thirty kronor to the peddler.

**Q6. Did the peddler respect the confidence reposed in him by the crofter?**  
**Ans:** No, the peddler did not respect the confidence reposed in him by the crofter. At the very first opportunity that he got, he smashed the window pane, took out the money and hung the leather pouch back in its place. Then he went away.

**THINK AS YOU READ**  
**Q1. What made the peddler think that he had indeed fallen into a rattrap?**  
**Ans:** The peddler realised that he must not walk on the public highway with the stolen money in his pocket. He went into the woods. He kept walking without coming to the end of the wood. Then he realised that he had fallen in the rattrap. He had let himself befooled by a bait and had been caught in.

**Q2. Why did the ironmaster speak kindly to the peddler and invite him home?**  
**Ans:** The ironmaster walked closely up to the peddler. In the uncertain reflection from the furnace, he mistook the man as his old regimental comrade, Captain Von Stahle. He addressed the stranger as Nils Olof, spoke very kindly and invited him home.

**Q3. Why did the peddler decline the invitation?**  
**Ans:** The peddler knew that the ironmaster had mistaken him for his old regimental comrade. Secondly, he had stolen money—thirty kronor—on him. Going to the ironmaster’s residence would be like entering the lion’s den. So, he declined the invitation.

**THINK AS YOU READ**  
**Q1. What made the peddler accept Edla Willmansson’s invitation?**  
**Ans:** Miss Edla Willmansson looked at the peddler quite compassionately. She noticed that the man was afraid. She assured him that he would be allowed to leave just as freely as he came. She requested him to stay with them over Christmas Eve. Her friendly manner made the peddler feel confidence in her and accept her invitation.

**Q2. What doubts did Edla have about the peddler?**  
**Ans:** As Edla lifted the peddler’s hat, he jumped up abruptly and seemed to be quite frightened. Even her kind looks, disclosure of her name and purpose of visit failed to calm him. From his fear, she thought that either he had stolen something or he had escaped from jail.

**Q3. When did the ironmaster realise his mistake?**  
**Ans:** Next morning, the stranger was cleaned and well-dressed. The valet had bathed him, cut his hair and shaved him. He was led to the dining room for breakfast. The ironmaster saw him in broad daylight. It was impossible to mistake him for an old acquaintance now. Then the ironmaster realised his mistake and threatened to call the Sheriff.

**Q4. How did the peddler defend himself against not having revealed his true identity?**  
**Ans:** The peddler explained that he had not tried to pretend as his acquaintance. He was not at fault. All along he had maintained that he was a poor trader. He had pleaded and begged to be allowed to stay in the forge. No harm had been done by his stay. He was willing to put on his rags again and go away.

**Q5. Why did Edla still entertain the peddler even after she knew the truth about him?**  
**Ans:** Edla did not think it proper 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 the reality of the peddler’s life and wanted him to enjoy a day of peace with them. Hence, she still entertained the peddler even after knowing the truth about him.

**THINK AS YOU READ**  
**Q1. Why was Edla happy to see the gift left by the peddler?**  
**Ans:** As soon as Edla opened the package of the gift, the contents came into view. She found a small rattrap with three wrinkled ten kronor notes and 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 embarrased at the Christmas season by a thief.

**Q2.Why did the peddler sign himself as Captain von Stahle?**  
**Ans:** The ironmaster has invited the peddler to his house mistaking him for Captain von Stahle. He was welcomed there and looked after as captain even after the reality became known. The peddler got a chance to redeem himself from dishonest ways by acting as an honourable Captain.

**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?**  
**Ans:** The peddler interprets the acts of kindness and hospitality shown by the crofter, the iron master and his daughter differently. He cheats the crofter as he provides him company in his loneliness and helps him pass time. He wants to get a couple of kronors from the iron master and is surprised at the contrasting style of behaviour of father and daughter. He is touched by the kindness, care and intervention of Edla on his behalf.

**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?**  
**Ans:** The ironmaster is impulsive\* whereas his daughter is cool, logical, kind and thoughtful. In uncertain light he (iron master) mistakes the stranger as his old regiment comrade. He invites him home and takes care of his feeding, clothing etc. When he sees him in broad day light he calls the man dishonest, demands an explanation and is ready to call in the sheriff. His daughter is more observant. She notices the fear of the stranger and thinks that either he is a thief or a run away prisoner. Inspite of that She is gentle, kind and friendly to him. She treats him nicely even after knowing the mistake in identity.

**Q3. The story has many instances of unexpected reactions from the characters to others’ behaviour. Pick out instances of these surprises.**  
**Ans:** The peddler is surprised at the warm welcome, generous supper, cheerful company and intimate confidences by the crofter. The ironmaster addresses the peddler as Captain von Stahle. He is surprised when the ironmaster calls him “Nils Olof. The ironmaster assumes his declining the invitation a result of embarrassment caused by his miserable clothing. The peddler’s comparison of the world to a rattrap makes the ironmaster laugh and he drops the idea of calling in the sheriff.  
The peddler looks at Edla in boundless amazement when she tells him that the suit is a Christmas present. She also invites him to spend next Christmas with them. She does all this even after knowing the mistake about his identity.The crofter is robbed by his guest, the rattrap peddler, in return of his hospitality.

**Q4. What made the peddler finally change his ways?**  
**Ans:** Edla Willmansson treated the tramp in a friendly manner. She was nice and kind to her. She interceded on his behalf when her father was about to turn him out. She still entertained the peddler even after knowing the truth about him. She offered him the suit as Christmas present and invited him to spend the next Christmas with them. Her love and understanding aroused the essential goodness in the peddler and finally he changed his ways.

**Q5. How does the metaphor of the rattrap serve to highlight the human predicament?**  
**Ans:** The world entices a person through the various good things of life such as riches and joy, shelter and food, heat and clothing. These were just like the baits in the rattrap. Once someone is tempted by the bait, the world closed on him.The peddler was tempted by thirty kronor of the crofter. It makes him hide himself. He walks through the wood. He is afraid to go to the Manor house. He gets peace only after returning the bait (money).

**Q6. The peddler comes out as a person with a subtle sense of humour. How7 does this serve in lightening the seriousness of the theme of the story and also endear him to us?**  
**Ans:** The peddler has a subtle sense of humour, which is revealed during his interactions with the ironmaster and his daughter after the truth about him becomes known. He is neither afraid of being turned out in cold in rags nor of being sent to prison. He makes the ironmaster laugh with his metaphor of the rattrap. His letter with the Christmas present to Edla is a fine example of his capacity to make others laugh at him. Thus, he lightens the seriousness of the theme of the story and also endears himself 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?**  
**Ans:** The peddler wins our sympathy for his way of life and how the world treats him. It is an admitted fact that the underdog always runs away with sympathy, so does the peddler with the rattraps. He begs the material like wire for his rattraps. His business not being specially profitable, he resorts to begging and petty thievery to keep body and soul together.  
His life is sad and monotonous. He plods along the road lost in his own meditation. The world has never been very kind to him and he feels happy in calling it a rattrap. Whenever, he asks shelter for the night, he meets sour faces. He is an unwelcome, unwanted and undesirable figure. The blacksmiths at forge glance at him only casually and indifferently. The master blacksmith nods a haughty consent without honouring him with a single word.  
The old and lonely crofter finds him an enjoyable company. The ironmaster mistakes him for an old regimental comrade. Only Edla Willmansson behaves with him in a kind, friendly manner. Her nice treatment arouses the tramp’s goodness. He redeems himself Hy returning the stolen money and wins our admiration. Thus, we see that the sympathy is not only well earned but well justified too.

**Q2. The story also focuses on human loneliness and the need to bond with others.**  
**Ans:** There are at least three characters in the story who suffer from loneliness and express the need to bond with others. They represent three strata of the human society as well. The peddler with the rattraps, the old crofter and the ironmaster all suffer from loneliness. The peddler is called a tramp, a vagabond and stranger at various points of the story. He moves wearily from one place to the other. He is lost in his own thoughts. He seeks shelter for night and people look at him with sour faces. Even the blacksmiths look haughtily at him and nod consent. The old crofter suffers from loneliness as he has neither wife nor child with him. Hence, he feels happy when he gets the peddler to talk to in his loneliness.  
The ironmaster is also lonely in his manor house. His wife Elizabeth has died and his sons are abroad. There is no one at home except his oldest daughter and himself. His requests to Captain von Stehle to accompany him show his need for human bonding. He admits frankly that they didn’t have any company for Christmas. The stranger turns down the request not because he is against bonding with others but because he fears being caught with stolen money.

**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?**  
**Ans:** Yes, I know how the kindness of a Bishop transformed a hard-hearted beastly convict into a man again with faith in God and human values. The story is presented in the form of a famous play ‘The Bishop’s Candlesticks’  
The Bishop provides food and shelter at midnight to a runaway convict who threatens him with a knife. Long years of imprisonment and harsh treatment in the prisonship has transformed the man into beast and he is devoid of all human feelings now. The convict runs away with the Bishop’s silver candlesticks, but is caught by the police.  
In order to save the convict from further punishment and torture, the Bishop tells the police officer that the fellow is his friend and he had himself given him the candlesticks. This kind act of the Bishop melts the hard heart of the convict. He sobs and weeps. He promises to be a man again.

**Q4. The story is both entertaining and philosophical. Discuss.**  
**Ans:** The story entertains us by providing glimpses into human nature and how people react to various situations. The actions of the peddler after stealing thirty kronor are quite amusing. The reactions of the blacksmiths to the tramp’s request for shelter show how casual and indifferent human beings can be.  
The U-turn in the ironmaster’s attitude towards the stranger reveal how selfish and ignorant human beings can be. Mistaking the vagabond for his old regimental comrade, whom he thinks he has run across unexpectedly, he asks the stranger to accompany him home and spend Christmas with them. When the stranger refuses to go with him, the ironmaster sends his daughter. With her better persuasive power she makes him follow her.  
The ironmaster is annoyed on seeing the stranger in broad daylight. But instead of realising his own mistake, he puts the blame on the man. He talks of handing him over to the sheriff. The metaphor of the world being a rattrap saves the situation for the tramp, but the ironmaster wants to turn him out. His daughter’s comments are quite entertaining and philosophical. She wants the tramp to enjoy a day of peace. Secondly, she does not want to chase away a person whom they had invited home and had promised Christmas cheer.