

Summary

'The beggar' is the story of a beggar named Lushkoff. While begging, he met an advocate, Sergei who gave him work. Sergei asked him to cut wood at his house. He asked the cook to show him the shed where wood was kept. The beggar was too weak and was under the influence of alcohol. He could barely stand on his feet. Still the cook, Olga told Sergei that the wood had been chopped. Sergei was glad that the man worked and paid him 50 copecks for chopping the wood. He asked him to come on the first day of every month for it. Sometimes he asked him to shovel the snow or to set the wood in the shed or to dust the rugs. He would pay between 20 to 40 copecks and once, gave his old trousers to him too.

When Sergei shifted his house, he employed the beggar to help in transporting the articles. The beggar had changed as he was sober that day and Sergei felt satisfied that his efforts had paid in reforming a drunkard. As he could read and write, Sergei asked his name, offered him better work and shook hands with him. After that day, Lushkoff the beggar was never seen.

After two years, Sergei was buying a ticket outside a theatre and spotted Lushkoff. Lushkoff was well dressed and was buying a ticket of the gallery area. Sergei was glad to see him and called him. Lushkoff was now working as a notary and earned 35 Roubles a month. He thanked Sergei for helping him out of the pit, for his kindness. Lushkoff told Sergei that it was not for him but for his cook, Olga that he was a changed man. She would scold him, cry for him and chopped the wood for him. Her behaviour transformed Lushkoff. With this, he went to the theatre.

Question and Answers

1. Has Lushkoff become a beggar by circumstance or by choice?

A. Lushkoff became a beggar due to his circumstances. He had been a singer in the choir but was removed due to his drunkenness. Left with no other option, he started begging to fend for himself.

2. What reasons does he give to Sergei for his telling lies?

A. Lushkoff told Sergei that he was fired because he was a drunkard. If he told the truth, people would not give him alms. Thus, he was forced to lie.

3. Is Lushkoff a willing worker? Why, then, does he agree to chop wood for Sergei?

A. Lushkoff was not willing to work because he was not fit. He was hungry, felt cold and was under the influence of alcohol. He agreed to chop wood for Sergei because of his pride and shame. He was trapped in his own words.

4. Sergei says, "I am happy that my words have taken effect." Why does he say so? Is he right in saying this?

A. When Sergei met Lushkoff for the first time, he was reluctant to work. Gradually, he took to work and reformed. Sergei felt that his words and deeds had changed Lushkoff. He is right in saying so because if he had not offered him work, Lushkoff would still be begging in the streets.

5. Lushkoff is earning thirty five roubles a month. How is he obliged to Sergei for this?

A. Lushkoff is obliged to Sergei for earning 35 roubles a month as a notary. When Sergei noticed that Lushkoff had given up drinking, he offered him a better job due to which Lushkoff became a notary one day.

6. During their conversation Lushkoff reveals that Sergei's cook, Olga, is responsible for the positive change in him. How has Olga saved Lushkoff?

A. Olga hated the beggar. She scolded him, felt pity for him and even chopped the wood for him. She would cry to see his pathetic condition. All this had an affect on Lushkoff and changed him.

Short Answer Type

Question 1.

What is the excuse that the beggar gives Sergei for begging when he meets him for the second time?

Answer:

He says he had been a village schoolmaster for eight years but had lost his job due to intrigues at his place of work. He had not eaten for three days and had no money for lodging.

Question 2.

How did Sergei respond to the beggar's request for money?

Answer:

He looked closely at him and recognised him as the same person who he had seen on Sadovya Street a few days back, when he had introduced himself as a student who had been expelled.

Question 3.

Why was Sergei disgusted with the beggar?

Answer:

He was disgusted at his dishonesty because he had seen him on another street pretending that he had been an expelled student in need of money, and now he claimed to be a village schoolmaster who had lost his job due to intrigues at the school. His lies disgusted Sergei.

Question 4.

What was the beggar's real identity?

Answer:

He had been part of the Russian choir, but had lost his place there due to drunkenness.

Question 5.

How does the beggar react to Sergei's offer to chop wood for him in return for money?

Answer:

The beggar accepts the offer readily and follows Sergei home. He says that he can't refuse because in those days even skilled woodcutters found themselves sitting without food and work.

Question 6.

Who did Sergei hand over the beggar to on reaching home? What were his instructions?

Answer:

He called his cook, Olga, and handed over the beggar to her. He asked her to take him to the wood-shed and get him to chop some wood.

Question 7.

Why has the beggar been described as a scarecrow?

Answer:

He has been described as a scarecrow because he was as thin as a scarecrow and shabbily dressed in ill-fitting, mismatched clothes.

Question 8.

What was the real reason the beggar agreed to work for the writer?

Answer:

The real reason was that he was a proud man and he felt ashamed at having been trapped by his own words in front of Sergei. He wanted to prove that he could do honest work when given the opportunity.

Question 9.

How did the narrator realise that the beggar had not come willingly with him?

Answer:

The narrator realised this from his gait. He shrugged his shoulders as if in perplexity and went irresolutely after the cook. It was also obvious that he was unhealthy and under the influence of liquor. It did not seem as though he had the strength to chop wood.

Question 10.

How did Olga react to the beggar?

Answer:

She glanced at the beggar with anger, shoved him aside with her elbow, unlocked the shed and angrily banged the door. She then flung down an axe at his feet, spat angrily and appeared to be scolding him.

Question 11.

How do we know that the beggar had no previous experience of cutting wood?

Answer:

We know this from the manner in which he pulled a billet of wood towards him and tapped it feebly with his axe. At first, the billet fell and then the beggar tapped it with the axe again cautiously, as if afraid of hurting himself with the axe.

Question 12.

How did Sergei react to the beggar's efforts at chopping wood?

Answer:

He felt a little sorry and ashamed of himself for having set a spoiled, drunken and sick man to work in the cold weather.

Question 13.

Why did the beggar appear at Sergei's house a month later?

Answer:

He reappeared on the first of the next month because the narrator had told him he could come back and cut wood for him in return for half a rouble.

Question 14.

What change took place in the beggar's visits after his second visit?

Answer:

He started appearing more often at the narrator's house and took on odd jobs like shovelling snow, putting the wood in the woodshed in order, beating the dust out of rugs and mattresses, etc.

Question 15.

How was the beggar rewarded for the odd jobs he did at the narrator's house?

Answer:

He was given twenty to forty copecks for the jobs he performed, and was once even given a pair of old trousers as a reward and payment.

Question 16.

What did Sergei expect the beggar to do when he called him while moving to another house? Did he behave as expected?

Answer:

When he was moving to another house, Sergei called the beggar and asked him to help with the packing and hauling of the furniture. However, the beggar did not do anything except hang around, sober, yet gloomy and silent.

Question 17.

Why do you think the beggar was so gloomy and silent when Sergei was moving houses?

Answer:

He was probably upset that he would no longer be able to do odd jobs at his house and make the money he had been earning.

Question 18.

What did Sergei offer Lushkoff? Why did he do so?

Answer:

Sergei offered Lushkoff a job with his friend, who needed someone to do some copying work. Since Lushkoff knew how to write, Sergei offered him this job.

Question 19.

When and where did Sergei meet Lushkoff after two years?

Answer:

Two years later, they met at the ticket window of a theatre, where Lushkoff was buying a ticket.

Question 20.

What surprised Sergei about Lushkoff when he met him at the theatre?

Answer:

He was surprised to see how much Lushkoff had changed. He was wearing decent clothes and had got a job as a notary, earning thirty five roubles.

Question 21.

What does Sergei call Lushkoff? Why does he do so?

Answer:

He calls him his godson, because he had scolded him and pushed him away from begging on the streets, encouraging him to take up respectable work. He had started as a copier, and was not working as a notary.

Question 22.

How does Lushkoff pay credit to Sergei?

Answer:

He says that he was indebted to Sergei for his push, because he would never have changed for the better, but would have continued to deceive people and beg. By following Sergei's instruction, he had dragged himself out of the pit he had created for himself.

Question 23.

What information does Lushkoff share with Sergei about the cook?

Answer:

Lushkoff speaks very highly of the cook, and gives all credit for his transformation to her. He informs Sergei that it was the nobility of the cook that had truly changed him. She had done all the errands for him so that he could earn the money offered by Sergei. She also used to cry for him, worried that he would end up in total ruin.

Question 24.

Mention two main qualities of the cook.

Answer:

She was compassionate and sensitive. Though she appeared to be tough and rude on the outside, she was very kind hearted, and actually helped him earn the money offered by doing all the work for him.

Question 25.

Discuss the title of the story. Is it appropriate?

Answer:

The Beggar is an appropriate title for the story, as it revolves around the transformation that takes place in the life of a beggar. He was a wastrel and did not do any work. It was only due to the compassion shown by the cook at the narrator's house that was he able to change his outlook.

When he was too drunk and weak to perform any of the odd jobs he was supposed to do, the cook did all the work for him, feeling sorry for him and worrying about his sorry state. This kindness on her part had a tremendous effect on the beggar, who changed his ways, stopped drinking and slowly over the years got a steady job as a notary, earning thirty five roubles as salary.

Long Answer Type

Question 1.

Has Lushkoff become a beggar by circumstance or by choice? What reasons does he give Sergei for lying?

Answer:

He has become a beggar both by circumstance and by choice. He had lost his position

in the Russian choir due to his drunkenness. As he did not have the motivation to work hard or the skills to find another job, begging was the easiest option. According to him, he has to lie to survive, as no one was willing to help him if he told them the truth.

Question 2.

Is Lushkoff a willing worker? Why does he agree to chop wood for Sergei?

Answer:

No, he is not a willing worker. He is too thin, weak and emaciated to work. He also remains drunk most of the time and is hence too unsteady to focus on any work. However, he agrees to chop wood for Sergei out of shame and pride, because he had been trapped by his own words. Sergei had caught him lying, and this was the only way he could redeem some of his self-respect.

Question 3.

Sergei says 'I am so happy that my words have taken effect'. Why does he say so? Is he right in saying this?

Answer:

He says this when he sees Lushkoff at the theatre and learns that he had improved his life greatly. He was no longer a drunkard and beggar; instead, he had become a notary, earning thirty five roubles a month. Sergei feels that he is responsible for this change in Lushkoff, and that the beggar changed his ways because of the scolding he had given him for begging and deceiving people.

He is right to some extent, because he had hurt Lushkoff's pride, and also offered him actual work chopping wood, and other odd jobs, which allowed him to earn money honestly. However, the real credit for Lushkoff's change went to Sergei's cook, who had actually done all the work that Lushkoff was supposed to do. Her selflessness, empathy and concern for his wellbeing had made such a deep impression on Lushkoff that he had changed his ways.

Question 4.

During their conversation, Lushkoff reveals that Sergei's cook is responsible for the positive change in him. How did Olga save Lushkoff?

Answer:

Olga, Sergei's cook, would react to Lushkoff's appearance at the house by shouting at him, but soon she would grow sad looking at his face, and start weeping. She would remind him that since he was a drunkard, he would burn in hell and this thought would make her cry again. Finally, seeing that he did not have the energy and ability to do the task he was supposed to, she herself would chop all the wood for him. Her concern and worry for him changed Lushkoff. He stopped drinking and worked hard to improve his life.

Question 5.

Both Sergei and his cook were kind to the beggar. Compare and contrast their

characters and the effect they had on Lushkoff.

Answer:

Sergei was a wealthy advocate with a kind heart. He appears to be a practical man who tries to stop Lushkoff from begging by giving him an alternative method of earning a living. He is also resourceful as he keeps engaging Lushkoff in different tasks, which are helpful for both the beggar and him. In the end he sends him to his friend, who needs someone to do some copying work. This helps the man to get a stable job and make a decent living. At first, he takes the credit for the beggar's transformation, but later he is humble enough to accept that though he provided the opportunity, it was his cook Olga who deserved the credit for inspiring the beggar to change.

The cook, on the other hand, is the most noble and compassionate character in the story. Initially, she appears to be angry with the arrival of the beggar, and seems to ill-treat and abuse him. In reality, however, she is the one who performs all the tasks for the beggar and lets him take the credit and money for them. She is empathetic to the extent that she cries seeing the state the beggar is in, and his fate if he continues to be a wastrel and drunkard.

It is her selflessness and compassion that brings about a change in the beggar's character. Because of her empathy, he is able to remain sober and starts working hard, becoming a notary earning a stable salary within two years. She is thus able to save the life of the beggar, even though she isn't actually aware of the profound effect she has on him, and never takes any credit for what she has done.