
Chapter - 4

The Rat Trap

By Selma Lagerlof

The peddler was a vagabond who sold rattraps with a little thievery on the side to make both ends meet. Had no worldly possession to call his own, not even a name. It amused him to think of the world as a rattrap and all the material possessions as bait as the world, he felt was never kind to him. Moreover, he prided himself in the fact that he was out of it.

Takes shelter at a crofter's cottage. The crofter welcomed him, gave him dinner, shared his pipe, played mjolis with him also confided in him about his income and showed him where he put it. Next morning, the Peddler steals the money and takes the back roads to keep away from people and gets lost in the jungle at night. While he wanders in the forest he realizes that he has also got caught in the rattrap and that the money was the bait.

Finally reaches Ramsjo ironworks, where he takes shelter for the night. The blacksmith and his assistant ignore him but the master mistakes him to be an old acquaintance and invites him home. Though the Peddler does not correct the ironmaster, hoping to get some money out of him, he declines his invitation.

The ironmaster then sends his daughter who persuades him to go home with her. She notices his uncouth appearance and thinks that either he has stolen something or he has escaped from jail.

The Peddler is scrubbed, bathed, given a haircut, a shave and a suit of old clothes of the ironmaster. In the morning light, the iron master realizes he is mistaken and that he is not the Captain. He wants to call the Sheriff. The peddler is agitated and breaks out that the world is rattrap and he too is sure to be caught in it. The ironmaster is amused but orders him out.

The compassionate Edla convinces her father that he should spend the Christmas day with him. The Peddler spends the whole of Christmas Eve eating and sleeping. The next day at church, Edla and her father come to know that the Peddler is a thief who stole thirty kroners from the poor crofter. Back home, they found a letter addressed to Edla, signed as Captain Von Stahl and a rattrap as a gift from the crofter. In the rattrap were the three ten kroner notes of the crofter.