



LONG ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

Q1. What is the theme of the story 'The Rattrap' ? How has this theme been developed?

Ans: The theme of the story is that most human beings are prone to fall into the trap of material benefit. However, every human being has an essential goodness that can be awakened through understanding and love. A human being has the tendency to redeem himself from dishonest ways.

The theme is developed with the help of the metaphor of the rattrap. The peddler of rattraps calls the world a big rattrap. The material benefits like riches and joys, shelter and food, heat and clothing are temptations that allure a person to fall into the rattrap of the world exactly as the bait of cheese and pork attract a rat to fall into the rattrap. Once someone takes the bait, the world closes in on him and then everything is lost.

The peddler is tempted by the thirty kronors of the old crofter. He steals the money. Now he is afraid of being caught and moves through the woods. It is the kind, sympathetic, loving and generous treatment given by Edla Willmansson that helps him get himself free from the rattrap of the world.

Q2. Give an account of the peddler's meeting with the old crofter. How does the peddler conduct himself? What light does this episode throw on human nature?

Ans: One dark evening the peddler reached a little gray cottage by the roadside. He knocked on the door to ask shelter for the night. The owner, an old man without wife or child, welcomed him. He was happy to get someone to talk to in his loneliness. He served him hot porridge for supper and gave him tobacco for his pipe. Then he played cards with him till bed time.

The host told the peddler that in his days of prosperity, he worked on land at Ramsjö Ironworks. Now his cow supported him. He sold her milk at the creamery everyday. He showed the peddler the thirty kronor notes he got as payment that month. Then he hung the leather pouch on a nail in the window frame. Next morning the crofter went to milk the cow, and the peddler went away. However, he returned after half an hour, broke the window pane, took the money out of the leather pouch and hang it back on the nail. This episode shows that in loneliness, human beings crave for company, for social bonding. Secondly, temptations can overpower the greatest philosopher. The peddler who calls the world a rattrap is himself tempted by thirty kronor.

Q3. How did the peddler feel after robbing the crofter? What course did he adopt and how did he react to the new situation? What does his reaction highlight?

Ans: Having robbed his generous host, the peddler felt quite pleased with his smartness. He did not feel any qualms of conscience that he had abused the confidence reposed in him by the crofter. The selfish wretch thought only of his own safety. He realised the danger of being caught by the police with the stolen thirty kronor on his person. Hence, he decided to discontinue walking on the public highway and turn off the road, into the woods. During the first few hours the woods caused him no difficulty. Later on, it became worse as it was a big and confusing forest. The paths

twisted back and forth. He kept on walking but did not come to the end of the wood. He realised that he had only been walking around in the same part of the forest. The forest closed in upon him like an impenetrable prison from which he could never escape. The reaction of the peddler highlights the predicament of human nature. Temptations lead to evil. The fruits of evil seem pleasant at first, but they deprive man of his goodness and push him into the maze of the world which holds a vice-like grip on him.

Q4. (i) 'The blacksmiths glanced only casually and indifferently at the intruder.'

(ii) "The ironmaster did not follow the example of the blacksmiths who had hardly deigned to look at the stranger * What do these attitudes reveal? How does the forge-episode help to develop the story? What is its implication?

Ans: The blacksmiths display the typical attitude of manual workers and labourers for whom work is the first priority and parasites on human society are drags on the fruit of their labour. The master blacksmith nods a haughty consent without honouring the intruder with a single word. Evidently, he regards the tramp as insignificant. The ironmaster, who is on his nightly round of inspection, behaves differently. He walks closely up to him and looks him over carefully. Then he removes his slouch hat to get a better view of his face. In the uncertain light of the furnace he mistakes the stranger for his old regimental comrade and requests him to go home with him. When the stranger declines the invitation, the ironmaster sends his daughter to persuade him to spend Christmas Eve with them. Thus the forge episode helps to develop the story.

The episode highlights the difference in the reactions of various persons to the same set of circumstances. This reveals the shades of human nature. It shows that even the person with best discernment may commit an error of judgement.

Q5. Bring out the contrast in the ironmaster's attitude and behaviour towards the stranger before and after he realises his mistake.

Ans: The ironmaster is moved to see his old regimental comrade in a pitiable state. He considers it a mistake on his part to have resigned from the regiment. He insists that his old comrade will go home with him. As the stranger declines the invitation, he thinks that the man feels embarrassed because of his miserable clothing. He explains that he does not have such a fine home that he cannot show himself there. He requests the stranger to provide company to him and his daughter for Christmas. When the stranger refuses thrice, he sends his daughter, with a big fur coat to persuade him. Just before breakfast on Christmas Eve, he thinks of feeding him well and providing him same honourable piece of work.

His behaviour undergoes a U-turn when he looks at the well-groomed stranger and realises his mistake. He expresses his displeasure with a wrinkled brow and demands an explanation from the man. Though the peddler defends himself well saying he never pretended to be someone else, the ironmaster calls him dishonest and threatens to hand him over to the sheriff. When the metaphor of world being a rattrap softens him a bit, he asks the peddler to quit at once.

Q6. What impression do you form of Edla on reading the story 'The Rattrap' ?

Ans: Miss Edla Willmansson is the eldest daughter of the owner of the Ramsjo Ironworks. She is not pretty, but modest and quite shy. She is quite obedient and visits the forge at the behest of her father. She has a wonderful power of observation and takes quick judgement. From the stranger's frightened looks, she concludes that he is either a thief or a runaway convict. She uses her skills of persuasion to make the stranger agree to accompany her home. Her compassionate looks, friendly manner and polite way of address help her. She tells her father that nothing about the man

shows that once he was an educated man. She believes in the spirit of Christmas and intercedes on behalf of the stranger to persuade her father to let him stay and be happy. She first makes a passionate plea and then argues that they should not chase away a person they had invited themselves and promised him Christmas cheer. Her dejection on learning that the peddler with rattraps was a thief reflects her sensitiveness. The gift of the captain makes her happy. It is her noble action that helps a thief redeem himself. In short, she is an intelligent, affectionate and kind young girl.

Q7. Comment on the ending of the story 'The Rattrap'.

Ans: The story 'The Rattrap' has a very beautiful ending. It helps us to realise that all is not lost for human beings who are prone to fall into the trap of material benefits. It is the protagonist of the story—the peddler with the rattraps—who coins the metaphor of the rattrap, falls himself in it on being tempted and ultimately redeems himself by renouncing the temptation. His admission that he had been the thief, and the treatment he got as a captain, show how love and understanding can transform even a depraved soul. The story thus comes a full circle with the ending. All questions are answered and no loose tags remain hanging. The ending also pays tribute to the goodness of humanity here exhibited through Miss Edla Willmanson. The happy ending also arouses our optimism and belief in the essential goodness of man and other human virtues. Thus it serves to inspire the readers to do noble acts.

Q8. Do you think the title of the story 'The Rattrap' is appropriate? Give reasons to support your answer.

Ans: The story has an appropriate and suggestive title. It at once draws our attention to the central theme—the whole world is a big rattrap. This metaphor helps us to understand the human predicament. All the good things of the world are nothing but baits to tempt a person to fall into the rattrap. Through the character of the peddler, the writer drives home the idea that most human beings are prone to fall into the trap of material benefits. The story begins with rattraps and ends with a rattrap as a present for someone who has helped a rat to get free from the rattrap. Even the middle of the story revolves round the rattrap. The actions of the peddler after he steals thirty kronor of the old crofter reveal the inner conflicts, tensions and lack of peace of a person who touches the bait of temptation. Renunciation of the temptation helps in redemption. Thus, we conclude that the title is apt and significant.

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