**A Question of Trust (victor canning)**

**Introduction**

This story is about a thief who gets a taste of his own medicine. Horace Danby can be termed as a thief with a difference. He steals only once in a year. He is fond of books and spends most of his booty on buying books. He plans meticulously before attempting a burglary. During his burglary attempt at a big house, he gathers all the necessary information and enters the house to steal but he is cheated by a lady thief, who claims to be the owner of the house. Finally, Horace ends up in prison only to repent at the way he was deceived by a person from his own profession.

**SUMMARY**

The story is about a 50 year old man who makes locks and lives with his housekeeper. He is a good citizen but not an honest one as he commits a robbery every year. He plans his robberies in such a way that the money he gets from there lasts him for at least a year and he is able to buy rare and expensive books with it. He buys these books because he is really fond of collecting rare and expensive books. He plans to rob at a grange named Shot over Grange. He collects all the information about the house like where the family had gone, how many servants were there in the house, what was the name of the dog, the wiring in the house, the safe in the house and even information like how much worth of jewels were there in the safe. The real twist in the story comes when he reaches the grange to rob and a woman claiming to be the owner’s wife enters. She gives him an option that she will forget that she had seen him if he opens the safe for her as she has forgotten the code of the safe and has to go to a party. He does not realize that he is opening the safe for another thief and that she is not the actual owner of the house. He leaves happily thinking that he is safe but doesn't realize the fact that he had opened the safe for someone else that too without wearing his gloves. 2 days later a police officer comes and arrests him saying that his fingerprints had been found at the shot over grange. He then realizes that he had been fooled by a lady who was herself a thief and from the same background as his. He is sent to the jail and becomes an assistant librarian. He feels angry whenever someone talks about honour among thieves as he had been cheated by one from his own community.

**Read and Find Out (Page 20)**

**Question 1.** What does Horace Danby like to collect?  
**Answer:** Horace Danby likes to collect rare and expensive books.

**Question 2.** Why does he steal every year?  
**Answer:** He stole every year so that he could buy the rare and expensive books that he loved to collect. Each year he planned carefully so as to steal enough to last twelve months.

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**Question 3**. Who is speaking to Horace Danby?  
**Answer:** A lady standing in the doorway is speaking to Horace Danby. She was young and pretty and was dressed in red. She said she had come just in time, or else her family would have been robbed by Horace. Thus she pretended to be one of the members of the family living at Shot over Grange.

**Question 4**. Who is the real culprit in the story?  
**Answer:** The real culprit in the story is the woman who pretended to be a member of the family living at Shot over Grange. She tricked Horace Danby into believing her, and cleverly took away all the jewels that were kept in the safe.

**Think About It (Page 25)**

**Question 1**. Did you begin to suspect, before the end of the story, that the lady was not the person Horace Danby took her to be? If so, at what point did you realise this, and how?  
**Answer:** Yes, we begin to suspect before the end of the story that the lady was not the person Horace Danby took her to be. She was unusually calm on seeing Horace. This seemed strange. When she did not call the police, and instead asked Horace to take out all the jewels from the safe, even if it meant breaking it open, it seemed suspicious as well. Moreover, it seemed highly unlikely that she would forget the number combination to open the safe. Therefore it was evident, before the story ended, that the lady was not the person Horace had taken her to be.

**Question 2.** What are the subtle ways in which the lady manages to deceive Horace Danby into thinking she is the lady of the house? Why doesn’t Horace suspect that something is wrong?  
**Answer:** The lady managed to deceive Horace Danby into thinking that she was the lady of the house with her subtle ways. She was dressed up pretty well, just like the lady of the house would be dressed. Her confident walk, her familiarity with the dog Sherry, her act of straightening the ornaments near the fireplace, her calm composure and the ease with which she picks a cigarette from the right place are enough to deceive anybody. She also regulated her tone and voice according to the situation. Thus Horace could not suspect that she was not the lady of the house. Apart from that, Horace was too frightened to think properly, so he didn’t suspect anything.

**Question 3.** “Horace Danby was good and respectable – but not completely honest”. Why do you think this description is apt for Horace? Why can’t he be categorized as a typical thief?  
**Answer**: Horace’s habits were not typical of a thief. He was fond of books. He used to steal only once in a year so he was never stealing more than his needs. However, an act of theft is still a crime, no matter how well a thief behaves, so this description is apt for Horace. He can’t be categorized as a typical thief because he is not a regular offender like other thieves.

**Question 4.** Horace Danby was a meticulous planner but still he faltered. Where did he go wrong and why?  
**Answer**: Horace Danby failed to get enough information about the real occupants of the house. He seemed to be too occupied with collecting information about the house map, wiring and location of valuable items. Although he was smart enough to know the dog’s actual name, he overlooked getting information about the occupants of the house. However, he was completely deceived by the lady he met at the house. He was outdone by her. He was taken in by her subtle ways, and did not realize that she herself could have been a thief. On seeing her, he got scared and his clever mind gave way to carelessness, leading him to open the safe without wearing gloves. He blindly believed the lady, and thus, in spite of his meticulous planning, he faltered.

**Talk About It (Page 25)**

**Question 1.** Do you think Horace Danby was unfairly punished, or that he deserved what he got? **(or)** Do you think Horace Danby was unfairly punished?**(CBSE 2013)**  
**Answer**: Horace Danby deserved what he got. A crime is a crime, no matter if it is committed for your own benefit or for somebody else’s benefit.

**Question 2.** Do intentions justify actions? Would you, like Horace Danby, do something wrong if you thought your ends justified the means? Do you think that there are situations in which it is excusable to act less than honestly?  
**Answer**: “Ends do not justify means”, is a very old and time-tested saying. For their own benefit nobody should harm others. But this world doesn’t function on idealism. There are many examples of people tricking people for quick gains. These acts should be deplored and dealt severely.

**Question 3.** Why does Horace Danby get angry when anyone talks about ‘honour among thieves’?  
**Answer:** When anyone talks about ‘honour among thieves’, Horace Danby gets angry because the young lady who cheated him was also a thief, yet did not follow this saying.

**Question 4.** Horace was clever but the lady in red was cleverer. Do you agree with this statement? Justify your answer.  
**Answer:** Yes, I agree with this statement. Horace was clever, as he planned the robbery carefully, studied the target, took the proper tools and also took his gloves, to ensure leaving no fingerprints. But the young lady in red had all the necessary information, and, posing as the mistress of the house, exploited Horace’s fear on being discovered, tricked him into opening the safe and handing her the jewels. She even ensured that Horace left his fingerprints at the site, as she distracted him by picking up a cigarette which Horace offered to light after removing his gloves. Thus the lady outwitted him.