

FLAMINGO

Lesson 4: The Rattrap

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Selma Lagerlof (1858-1940) was a Swedish writer whose stories have been translated into many languages. This story is set in the middle of the mines of Sweden which are rich in iron ore. The story is narrated in the manner of a fairy tale. It gives us the message that the emotions of love and acceptance can reform others

CHARACTERS

1. A peddler with rattraps.
2. An Oldman: A crofter.
3. Master Smith in the Ramsjo Iron Mill in Sweden.
4. Helpers in the Mill: blacksmiths
5. Iron mill owner.
6. Edla Willmansson – daughter of the Iron Mill owner.

THEME

The story is about an old disheartened peddler who is taken in and shown generosity by a young woman. Her generosity and kindness change his bitter attitude towards life. The peddler is a man who has fallen upon his misfortune and now resorts to selling rattraps, begging and thievery. He is pessimistic about the world around him and sees the world as merely a “rat trap”. He believes that society tempts us with riches and fine things, and we accept, we are caught in the trap and are left with nothing.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

The Rattrap Man:

- Made his living by selling Rattrap.
- Business was not profitable.
- Had to beg and steal.

His philosophy:

- Whole world a Rattrap (used metaphorically).
- It offers riches, joys, shelter, food, etc., as bait.
- Everything comes to an end and with no return.

Shelter at Crofter's house:

- One night rattrap man stayed at an old man's house.
- Old man happy to have company.
- Simple, generous, hospitable, served porridge.
- Offered big slice from tobacco roll; played cards.
- Told him about his prosperous past.
- Now his cow supported him, earned thirty kronors.
- Showed the rattrap man pouch having those kronors.
- Next day the rattrap man stole money.

Rattrap Man lost his way:

- Did not continue on public highway.
- Went into woods, lost his way.
- Walked endlessly, tired.
- Realized he himself has been caught in a rattrap.
- Heard sounds of hammer strokes.
- Walked in that direction, reached iron mill.
- Found master Smith, did not notice rattrap man.
- Later blacksmith granted him permission to sleep.

Ironmaster and his daughter Edla:

- Owner of Ramsjö Iron Mill.
- Mistook rattrap man as an old acquaintance called Von Stable.
- Invited him home to spend Christmas.
- Rattrap Man did not agree.
- Agreed when Edla came and requested.
- Overwhelmed by her compassionate and friendly manner.

Secrets Revealed:

- Rattrap Man was given bath and new dress.
- Iron Man realized his mistake that the rattrap man was not his friend.
- Complaint that rattrap man had no attempt to hide.
- The peddler ready to leave the new dress and wear old rags.
- Edla requested her father to let him stay.
- The Rattrap Man turned a new leaf.
- Quietly ate food, slept whole time.
- Next morning father and daughter went to church.
- They heard that the Crofter's was robbed by the rattrap man.
- Daughter sad, father anxious, if their house would also have been robbed.
- But the peddler had left a gift of a small rattrap with thirty kronors and a note.
- Wished money to be returned to crofter.

- Confessed that he had made a mistake.
- Got caught in his own rattrap.
- Thanked Edla for treating him like a real captain.

QUESTIONS

Q1. What did the peddler do to keep his body and soul together?

-The peddler sold ratttraps to earn his living. However, it was not enough so he also had to depend on begging and petty thievery.

Q2. In what sense was the world a big rattrap according to the peddler?

Value points:

- World full of temptations like a rattrap.
- Offered riches and joys, shelter and food, heat and clothing; when someone was tempted to touch them it would close on him and then everything came to an end.

Q3. Why was the peddler amused at the idea of the world being a rattrap?

Value points:

- Others got entrapped whereas he was not lured by temptation/free from the rattrap.
- Gave him joy to think I'll of the world in this way.

Q4. How was the peddler received in the cottage?

Value points:

- To ask for shelter for the night; the crofter treated him kindly; offered him shelter in his cottage; gave him food; also played cards with him and smoked tobacco.

Q5. Why was the crofter happy when the peddler knocked at the door?

- The Crofter was happy when the peddler knocked at the door because he used to stay there alone. He was happy to have some company and someone to share his things and achievements with.

Q6. How was the crofter generous with his confidence when he spoke to the peddler?

- The crofter was generous with his 'confidences' as he told the peddler about his thirty kronors. Not only that, he even showed them to him.

Q7. Why did the crofter show the thirty kronors to the peddler?

Value points:

- The crofter felt proud of the cow that gave him enough milk to support him.
- To convince the peddler.
- Was lonely/happy to share confidences generously with the peddler.
- Trusting

Q8. Why did Edla plead with her father not to send the Vagabond away?

Value points:

- Walks the whole year long/chased away/ no home that makes him feel welcome/afraid of being arrested/ wants to him to enjoy atleast one day of peace/ morally they ought not to turn away a human whom they have invited for Christmas and promised for Christmas cheer.