

## The Rattrap



**Selma Lagerlof**

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Selma Ottilia Lovisa Lagerlöf (20 November 1858 – 16 March 1940) was a Swedish author and teacher. She published her first novel, *Gösta Berling's Saga*, at the age of 33. She was the first woman to win the Nobel Prize in Literature, which she was awarded in 1909. Additionally, she was the first woman to be granted a membership in The Swedish Academy in 1914.

## INTRODUCTION

'The Rattrap' is a story that gives us a psychological insight into human nature. The author highlights how greed for material things entraps human beings. The story upholds the belief that the essential goodness of the human being can be awakened through love and understanding. It brings into focus the idea that the world is a rattrap. Riches, joys, shelter and food are all lucrative baits to trap mankind.

## MAIN CHARACTERS

The Peddler – The protagonist

Crofter – A lonely old man

Ironmaster – Owner of Ramjo ironworks

Edla Williamson – Daughter of the Ironmaster

Master Smith – A worker at the iron mill

## SUMMARY

A rattrap peddler went around selling

small rat traps. His clothes were in rags. His cheeks were hollow. He had the look of a starved man. He made wire traps. He begged for the material from stores and big farms. Sometimes he resorted to begging and a little stealing to survive. The world had never been kind to him. He had no home, no shelter. The peddler led a lonely life. One day while he was thinking about his rat traps, an idea struck him. He thought that the world itself was a rattrap. As soon as anybody touched it, the trap closed on them. He was amused to think of some people who were already trapped, and some others who were trying to reach the bait in the trap. It was a cold evening in December. He reached a cottage on the roadside. He knocked at the door and asked for a night's shelter. The owner of the cottage was a lonely old crofter. He wanted someone to talk to. He welcomed the peddler. He gave the peddler hot porridge to eat, and tobacco to smoke. Then they played cards. The crofter was generous as well as trustful. He told the peddler that he had a cow and sold her milk to a creamery. He also told him that he received thirty kronors as payment the previous month. Then he took down a pouch and showed him the money. Then he put the money back in the pouch and hung it on a nail in the window frame. Next morning the peddler left. The crofter locked his cottage, and went away. The peddler came back to the cottage. He had been tempted to steal the money that hung like bait in the window frame.

He smashed the pane and stole the money. Now he thought it was not safe to walk along the public highway. So he went into the woods. There he walked and walked but could not get out. He moved in circles. He was tired. He looked upon the forest as a rattrap in which he was caught. He thought his end was near. He lay down to die. After a while he heard regular thumping of a hammer's strokes. He knew the sound was coming from Ramsjö Ironworks. He stood up and walked in the direction of the sound. He opened the gate of the ironworks and went into the forge. The owner came on his nightly rounds and noticed the ragged wretch near the furnace. The ironmaster looked intently at the peddler's face. He felt sure that the peddler was one of his old regimental comrades, Captain von Stable who had fallen on evil days. He invited the peddler to go home with him for Christmas. But the peddler was alarmed. He thought it was risky for him to accept the offer. He firmly declined it. The ironmaster went home. The ironmaster sent his daughter Edla to persuade the peddler to come home. She spoke gently to him. The peddler felt confidence in her and agreed to go with her. On the way he was sorry to have stolen the crofter's money that had put him in a trap. The ironmaster was happy to have his old regimental comrade under his roof. He planned to feed him well and give him some respectable work. The servant cut the peddler's hair, shaved him and bathed him. The peddler appeared wearing one of the ironmaster's fine

suits. But when the ironmaster looked at him in daylight, he felt that he had made a mistake. The peddler was not captain von Stable. He thought that the man had deceived him. He even thought of handing him to the sheriff. The peddler said that he had not pretended to be what he was not. He had not been willing to go to the ironmaster's house. Even then he was willing to put on his rags and leave. He also told the ironmaster that the world was a rattrap, and he himself might one day be tempted by big bait and get caught in the trap. The ironmaster told him to leave at once. Edla did not like her father's asking the poor peddler to leave. She thought it was unfair to turn away the man whom they had invited. She wanted to have the joy of entertaining a homeless wanderer on Christmas Eve. She stopped the peddler and her father agreed to it. Edla served food to the peddler. He was given Christmas presents which he thankfully received. Edla told him that her father's suit that the peddler was wearing was also a Christmas present. She assured him that he would be welcomed again if he liked to spend the next Christmas Eve with them. Next morning the ironmaster and his daughter went to church. There they learned that the peddler was a thief. He had robbed the crofter. The ironmaster was sure that the peddler must have made away with their silver. Edla was dejected. But when they reached home they learned that the peddler had left. But he had taken away nothing. On the other hand he

had left a Christmas present for Edla. Edla opened the present. It was a tiny rattrap. Edla was happy to see that the peddler had left the crofter's money behind. There was a letter also. It was addressed to Edla. He thanked her for her kindness. He wanted to repay her kindness. So he had left the crofter's money and had requested her to return it to the crofter. He said he had been promoted to captain. That was why he could come out of the rattrap in which he had been caught. He signed the letter Captain von Stahle.

## QUESTION AND ANSWER

Q1. What made the peddler think that he had indeed fallen into a rattrap?

**Answer:** After stealing the money, the peddler tried to escape through the forest but soon got lost. Left in despair, he recollected his own thoughts on the world being a giant rattrap. A sudden realisation came to him that he had finally got himself caught in the rattrap because he allowed himself to be tempted by the bait, the thirty kronor bills. Similarly, on his way to the ironmaster's home, he felt himself caught in the trap. He was again haunted by such thoughts when the ironmaster, on realising the truth about the peddler, threatened to get him arrested. The rattrap seller expressed himself strongly realising that the worldly bait had, once more, tempted and trapped him.

Q2. Why did the peddler knock on the cottage by the roadside? How was he treated by the Owner Of the cottage?

**Answer:** The peddler knocked on the cottage by the roadside to seek shelter for the night. The owner of the cottage was a crofter who lived there alone. He regarded the peddler as welcome company and treated him quite hospitably. He not only put him up for the night, but also offered him food and played cards with him.

Q.3 Why was he amused by this idea?

**Answer:** The peddler was amused by the idea of the world being a giant rattrap because he was never treated kindly by the world. Therefore, he harbored hard feelings for it and loved 'to think ill of it' by comparing it with a giant rattrap.

Q4. Why was the crofter so talkative and friendly with the peddler?

**Answer:** The crofter was a lonely fellow who lived on his own in a little gray cottage by the roadside. He had no wife or children, and craved company and friends. So, one day when the peddler turned up at his doorstep, he was happy to find someone to talk to, to be relieved of his boredom and monotony. This is the reason he was so talkative and friendly with the peddler.

Q5 What conclusion did the ironmaster reach when he heard that the crofter had been robbed by the peddler?

**Answer:** It was at the church that the ironmaster and his daughter heard that the crofter had been robbed by a peddler, who, no doubt, was the one they had sheltered at the manor house.



The ironmaster at once concluded that the peddler would probably have stolen all his silverware in their absence, and run away.

Q6. What were the contents of the package left by the peddler as a Christmas gift for Edla Willmansson?

**Answer:** The package left by the peddler as a Christmas gift for Edla Willmansson comprised a small rattrap with three wrinkled ten kronor notes in it, which the peddler had robbed from the crofter. It also contained a brief letter for Edla explaining the peddler's conduct.

Q7. How does the metaphor of the rattrap serve to highlight the human predicament?

**Answer:** The world entices a person through the various good things of life such as riches and joy, shelter and food, heat and clothing. These were just like the baits in the rattrap. Once someone is tempted by the bait, the world closed on him. The peddler was tempted by thirty kronor of the crofter. It makes him hide himself. He walks through the wood. He is afraid to go to the Manor house. He gets peace only after returning the bait (money).

### MCQ

Q1- Who is the author of The Rattrap?

- A) Selma Lagerlof
- B) Thomas B. Allen
- C) Howard Phillips

D) Sudha Murthy

**Ans A**

Q2- Which country does the author belong to?

- A) Singapore
- B) Sydney
- C) Sweden
- D) Switzerland

**Ans C**

Q3- In what manner has the story been narrated?

- A) Non-fiction style
- B) Realistic manner
- C) Fairy tale manner
- D) None of these

**Ans C**

Q4- What is the message of the story?

- A) Love and kindness are powerful reformers.
- B) Kindness is powerless
- C) Kindness encourages thieves
- D) Thieves need reprimand

**Ans A**

Q5- This story revolves around whom?

- A) Around Crofter and his daughter
- B) Around crofter

- C) Around ironman
- D) Around peddler- the Rattrap seller

**Ans D**

Q6- In the peddler's view, what does the world look like?

- A) A Rat
- B) A Jungle
- C) A Jigsaw
- D) A Rattrap

**Ans D**

Q7- Why did the peddler have to take shelter?

- A) Because of his wishes
- B) Because he wants to steal
- C) Because he wants to be with his friends
- D) Because he had no home

**Ans D**

Q8- What does the metaphor Rattrap in the lesson signify?

- A) Humans
- B) Thieves
- C) Attractions
- D) Human greed and distractions

**Ans D**

Q9- From where did the Peddler get the idea of the world being a Rattrap?

- A) From his friends' situation
- B) From Crofter's behavior
- C) From Edla's words
- D) From his circumstances and miserable life condition

**Ans D**

Q10- When does the ironmaster realise his mistake?

- A) when the peddler speaks
- B) when he sees an old photograph
- C) when the peddler changes clothes and cleans his face
- D) All of these

**Ans C**

Q11- How much money had the peddler stolen from Crofter?

- A) 20 kronors
- B) 10 kronors
- C) 40 kronors
- D) 30 kronors

**Ans D**

**Q12. Why was the Crofter so talkative and friendly with the Peddler?**

- A. because he knew him.
- B. he was his friend
- C. he was his neighbor
- D. because of his resemblance to one of his old friend

**Ans D**

### **WORD MAENINGS**

Sunken - lowered

Vagabond - wanderer

Dejected - sad

Generous - liberal

Kronor - Currency of Sweden

Incredulous - unbelieving

Despair- hopelessness

Rolling mill - machine to roll metal into sheets

Modest - humble

Splendor - luxury

Preach - advice

Amazement - wonder

Plods - walks heavily

Prosperity - riches