


The Rattrap

Selma Lagerlof

Flamingo - Prose, Ch 4

About the Author

Selma Lagerlof (1858 - 1940) was a Swedish writer ; ~~first~~ first woman to win the Nobel Prize in Literature (1909). Famous for stories rooted in Swedish folklore and a deep sense of human compassion.

<- rattrap 

Setting

Rural Sweden, late 19th century. The iron-mining belt - forests, scattered cottages, a forge run by a wealthy master. Cold winter, Christmas Eve - symbolic of warmth, charity & moral light.

Type of Story

Allegorical short story - a tale where every object and event also carries a moral / philosophical meaning. The rattrap ~~itself~~ ^{<- rattrap} is the central extended metaphor for the world.

Read with focus on - bait, trap, redemption.

Plot Summary (I)

1. The Peddler

A poor vagabond sells small rattraps, made of wire he begs for. Walks village to village, sleeps where he can ; ~~happy~~ miserable & lonely. One day a thought strikes him - the whole world is a giant rattrap. Land, riches, joys, food - all are mere baits. Once you are tempted, the trap closes on you. *

< 30 kr



2. The Crofter

One night he knocks at a small cottage. An old crofter (without wife / child) welcomes him in, shares porridge, tobacco & cards.

The crofter brags - he earned 30 kronor from his cow ; shows the notes hung in a leather pouch from the window-frame.

3. The Theft

Next morning, peddler leaves - comes back, breaks the window, steals the 30 kronor.

He has fallen into ~~a~~ his own bait.

Fears the highway - hides in dark forest.

Loses his way - the trap has snapped shut.

Plot Summary (II)

4. At the Forge

Cold and exhausted, he stumbles into Ramsjö ironworks at night. Lies down near the warm furnace. The ironmaster, on his round, sees him in the glow of the fire and mistakes him for an old ~~friend~~ regimental comrade - Capt. von Stahle.

5. The Invitation

Ironmaster invites him home for Christmas. Peddler refuses - fears arrest if true identity comes out. The master leaves. Soon his daughter Edla Willmansson arrives.

<- wreath



6. Edla's Persuasion

She speaks gently, with real warmth. Even after sensing he is not the captain, she still convinces him to come - promises Christmas cheer, no questions asked. He agrees.

7. Christmas Morning


In daylight, ironmaster sees his mistake - wants him out. Edla intervenes - pleads to let him stay one Christmas day, as their guest. Kindness, not contempt, is her response.

Climax & Characters (I)

8. The Gift & Letter

After church the family returns to find a small package left for Edla. Inside - a rattrap, the stolen ~~notes~~ 30 kronor, and a letter signed 'Captain von Stahle'.

He asks her to return the money to the crofter and thanks her for treating him as a captain - so he could behave like one in turn.

< - the gift 

Character - The Peddler

- * Poor wanderer - symbol of social outcast.
- * Bitter, cynical - sees world as a trap.
- * Capable of theft when tempted - weak.
- * Yet has a hidden core of decency - is ashamed, returns the money in the end.
- * Capacity for change = the story's heart.

Character - The Crofter

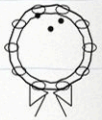
- * Old, lonely, talkative - craves company.
- * Generous to a stranger - shares food, tobacco, cards, even his savings story.
- * Naive - shows off his 30 kr - the bait.
- * Stands for trust & open-hearted goodness of the rural poor.

Characters (II)

The Ironmaster

- * Wealthy owner of Ramsjö ironworks.
- * Impulsive - invites a stranger thinking he is an old comrade (von Stahle).
- * Hospitality is shallow - driven by class & identity, not real compassion.
- * Once truth is out, wants him thrown out.
- * Foil to ~~Eda~~ Edla - his snobbery vs her grace.
Represents conditional charity.

<- wreath



Edla Willmansson

- * Young, perceptive - notices the peddler's fear at the very first meeting.
- * Compassionate - treats him as a guest even after knowing he is not the captain.
- * Calm, firm - defends him to her father.
- * Symbol of Christian charity & dignity.
- * Her unconditional kindness is what finally redeems the peddler.

Foil : Ironmaster vs Edla

| | |
|---------------------|-------------------|
| loud, status-driven | quiet, principled |
| acts on illusion | acts on insight |
| withdraws kindness | extends it freely |

Themes & Devices

The Rattrap as Allegory

Central extended metaphor of the story :


WORLD = RATTRAP ; RICHES = BAIT

Land, money, comfort, love - the moment we let ourselves be tempted, the trap snaps.

The peddler steals the 30 kr - walks into the very trap he had warned others about.

Themes

- (1) Kindness as redemption - Edla's grace lifts the peddler out of his trap.
- (2) Loneliness & need for belonging.
- (3) Materialism - greed traps the soul.
- (4) Essential goodness of human beings.
- (5) Christmas as moral renewal.

<- the trap 

Literary Devices

- * Extended metaphor - rattrap = ~~the~~ world.
- * Irony - rattrap-seller is himself trapped.
- * Symbolism - 30 kr = bait ; fire = warmth & moral light ; Christmas = grace.
- * Narrative compassion - authorial warmth.

Quotes, Exam Points, Revision

Key Quotations

- (a) 'The whole world... is nothing but a big rattrap.' - the peddler's worldview.
- (b) 'I want you to enjoy a day of peace with us.' - Edla's invitation.
- (c) Signed 'Captain von Stahle' - he finally becomes worthy of the title.

<- 30 kr



Exam-pattern Points

- Q1. Short Ans (3 m) - Why did the peddler think the world was a rattrap ?
- Q2. Short Ans (3 m) - How did Edla treat the peddler & why ?
- Q3. Long Ans (6 m) - The rattrap as an allegory of human life. Discuss.
- Q4. Long Ans (6 m) - Character sketch of ~~Edla~~ the peddler & his transformation.

<- wreath



Quick Revision

Peddler -> Crofter -> Forest ->
 Forge -> Manor -> Edla -> Gift.

Moral : understanding & kindness rescue people from the rattraps they fall into.

End of chapter notes - The Rattrap.