

Class XII
Subject- English
Chapter- The Rattrap

It was not more than half an hour before they heard the sound of carriage wheels outside the forge, and a new guest came in, but this time it was not the ironmaster. He had sent his daughter, apparently hoping that she would have better powers of persuasion than he himself.

After a gap of half an hour, the ironmaster sent his daughter. He hoped that his daughter may bring his friend home as he believed that she was better at persuading others.

She entered, followed by a valet, carrying on his arm a big fur coat. She was not at all pretty, but seemed modest and quite shy. In the forge everything was just as it had been earlier in the evening. The master blacksmith and his apprentice still sat on their bench, and iron and charcoal still glowed in the furnace. The stranger had stretched himself out on the floor and lay with a piece of pig iron under his head and his hat pulled down over his eyes. As soon as the young girl caught sight of him, she went up and lifted his hat. The man was evidently used to sleeping with one eye open. He jumped up abruptly and seemed to be quite frightened.

Valet: personal attendant

Modest: humble

Apprentice: learner

The iron master's daughter entered the mill with her attendant who was carrying a big fur coat. She was a humble girl who was very shy. When she entered, everyone was busy the same way as they had been earlier. The blacksmith was still sitting on the bench with his trainees and was working on the iron. She went up to the peddler and lifted his hat. The peddler slept with one eye open and as soon as he saw her, he got shocked and jumped up.

"My name is Edla Willmansson," said the young girl. "My father came home and said that you wanted to sleep here in the forge tonight, and then I asked permission to come and bring you home to us. I am so sorry, Captain, that you are having such a hard time."

She introduced herself as Edla Williamson and was sorry to hear about the hard times that he was facing. She explained to him that she had come to take him home with her father's permission.

She looked at him compassionately, with her heavy eyes, and then she noticed that the man was afraid. "Either he has stolen something or else he has escaped from jail", she thought, and added quickly, "You may be sure, Captain, that you will be allowed to leave us just as freely as you came. Only please stay with us over Christmas Eve."

Compassionately: showing sympathy for others

Edla had sympathy for the peddler. But then she noticed that the reason behind his fear could be that either he had committed robbery or jailbreak. So, she said that he was free to

leave their house at any time but she wanted him to stay with the family just for Christmas Eve.

She said this in such a friendly manner that the rattrap peddler must have felt confidence in her. "It would never have occurred to me that you would bother with me yourself, miss," he said. "I will come at once."

Edla was talking to peddler in a very nice way which made him believe her and he got ready to go with her.

fur coat

He accepted the fur coat, which the valet handed him with a deep bow, threw it over his rags, and followed the young lady out to the carriage, without granting the astonished blacksmiths so much as a glance. But while he was riding up to the manor house he had evil forebodings.

Astonished: greatly surprised

Forebodings: a foretelling

The peddler wore the fur coat offered by the valet and started following the lady. He didn't even bother to notice the other people in the room. On the way to the house, the peddler felt that as he had committed a crime, he would be punished for it.

"Why the devil did I take that fellow's money?" he thought. "Now I am sitting in the trap and will never get out of it."

He started cursing himself that if he had not stolen the money, he would not have got trapped like this. The money was a bait which had led him into a trap.

The next day was Christmas Eve, and when the ironmaster came into the dining room for breakfast he probably thought with satisfaction of his old regimental comrade whom he had run across so unexpectedly. "First of all we must see to it that he gets a little flesh on his bones," he said to his daughter, who was busy at the table. "And then we must see that he gets something else to do than to run around the country selling rattraps."

Flesh on his bones: here it means that the seller should eat good food to gain some flesh on his body

The next day was Christmas Eve, both the ironmaster and his daughter were at the dining table. The ironmaster said to his daughter that they had to do something good for the peddler and should try to find some better job for him.

"It is queer that things have gone downhill with him as badly as that," said the daughter. "Last night I did not think there was anything about him to show that he had once been an educated man." "You must have patience, my little girl," said the father. "As soon as he gets clean and dressed up, you will see something different. Last night he was naturally embarrassed. The tramp manners will fall away from him with the tramp clothes."

Queer: strange

Embarrassed: awkward, shy

the iron masters

The iron master's daughter said that it was strange to see that the peddler had been in such hard times and was doubtful whether the man had been educated. Hearing this, the ironmaster clarified that it was due to his bad condition. He also added that the man would behave differently after getting clean and dressed up.

Just as he said this the door opened and the stranger entered. Yes, now he was truly clean and well dressed. The valet had bathed him, cut his hair, and shaved him. Moreover he was dressed in a good-looking suit of clothes which belonged to the ironmaster. He wore a white shirt and a starched collar and whole shoes.

Starched collar: Starch is the stuff that makes your shirt collar look crisp and fresh.

Whole shoes: Proper fitted shoes

While both father – daughter were discussing about the peddler, he entered the room with the valet. He was looking clean as he had bathed and his hair had been cut by the valet. He was wearing the ironmaster's clothes and shoes – a shirt with a starched collar and shoes which covered the entire feet.

But although his guest was now so well groomed, the ironmaster did not seem pleased. He looked at him with puckered brow, and it was easy to understand that when he had seen the strange fellow in the uncertain reflection from the furnace he might have made a mistake, but that now, when he stood there in broad daylight, it was impossible to mistake him for an old acquaintance. "What does this mean?" he thundered. The stranger made no attempt to dissimulate. He saw at once that the splendor had come to an end.

Groomed: ready

Puckered: wrinkle

Dissimulate: pretend

Splendor: luxury

Thundered: make a loud noise

The ironmaster seemed very angry to see his well groomed guest as now he could make out his appearance well and realized that he was not his comrade. He understood that he mistook some stranger as his old friend. He screamed at him and asked him to explain. The peddler knew that the iron master could make out that he was not his old friend. As he already knew this, he was ready for the consequences and felt that the luxurious treatment was about to end.

"It is not my fault, sir," he said. "I never pretended to be anything but a poor trader, and I pleaded and begged to be allowed to stay in the forge. But no harm has been done. At worst I can put on my rags again and go away". "Well," said the ironmaster, hesitating a little, "it was not quite honest, either. You must admit that, and I should not be surprised if the sheriff would like to have something to say in the matter."

sheriff

Hesitating: to be reluctant

Sheriff: chief executive officer of crown (in England)

The peddler tried to explain that he should not be blamed. He said that he was just begging for a stay in the forge. He also said that he had not harmed anyone and was ready to wear his rags again. To this, the ironmaster hesitated and said that the peddler had not been quite honest and so, he wanted to call the sheriff.

The tramp took a step forward and struck the table with his fist. "Now I am going to tell you, Mr. Ironmaster, how things are," he said. "This whole world is nothing but a big rattrap. All the good things that are offered to you are nothing but cheese rinds and bits of pork, set out to drag a poor fellow into trouble. And if the sheriff comes now and locks me up for this, then you, Mr. Ironmaster, must remember that a day may come when you yourself may want to get a big piece of pork, and then you will get caught in the trap."

Fist: A person's hand bent

The rattrap seller gets so enraged upon hearing about the sheriff, that he struck the table very hard with his fist. He said that this world is a rattrap and all the good things are a bait just like the rinds of cheese and the small pieces of pork are a bait for the rat which are offered to trap it. Not only this, he also pointed out to the ironmaster that he may today be imprisoned by the sheriff but one day, the ironmaster will also get trapped like this.

The ironmaster began to laugh. "That was not so badly said, my good fellow. Perhaps we should let the sheriff alone on Christmas Eve. But now get out of here as fast as you can."

The iron master didn't like the peddler's words and decided not to call the sheriff. He asked the peddler to leave at once.

But just as the man was opening the door, the daughter said, "I think he ought to stay with us today. I don't want him to go." And with that she went and closed the door. "What in the world are you doing?" said the father. The daughter stood there quite embarrassed and hardly knew what to answer. That morning she had felt so happy when she thought how homelike and Christmassy she was going to make things for the poor hungry wretch. She could not get away from the idea all at once, and that was why she had interceded for the vagabond.

Wretch: miserable person

Interceded: intervened

The iron master's daughter stopped the peddler. She wanted to help the poor fellow. Since morning, she was planning how she could make the peddler's day happy on the occasion of Christmas. Therefore, she went against her father's will and stopped him by closing the door.

"I am thinking of this stranger here," said the young girl. "He walks and walks the whole year long, and there is probably not a single place in the whole country where he is welcome and can feel at home. Wherever he turns he is chased away. Always he is afraid of being arrested and cross-examined. I should like to have him enjoy a day of peace with us here —"

just one in the whole year.” The ironmaster mumbled something in his beard. He could not bring himself to oppose her. “It was all a mistake, of course,” she continued. “But anyway I don’t think we ought to chase away a human being whom we have asked to come here, and to whom we have promised Christmas cheer.”

She tried to explain the difficulties faced by the peddler. She said that he didn’t have any house. He was turned out from wherever he went and he always kept on running in order to safeguard himself from being arrested. She said that she wanted him to enjoy Christmas with peace as they had promised him. They should not send away a man on Christmas, the man whom they had promised happiness on the day. The iron master was not able to find an answer to go against his daughter.

“You do preach worse than a parson,” said the ironmaster. “I only hope you won’t have to regret this.” The young girl took the stranger by the hand and led him up to the table. “Now sit down and eat,” she said, for she could see that her father had given in.

Preach: advice

Parson: Churchman

The only thing he could say to his daughter was that she was trying good at convincing others – better than the priest at the church. But he also warned her that hopefully, her decision would not bring any adverse effect on them. The girl took the peddler to the table and offered him food. She saw that her father had consented to her wish.

The man with the rattraps said not a word; he only sat down and helped himself to the food. Time after time he looked at the young girl who had interceded for him. Why had she done it? What could the crazy idea be?

The peddler didn’t say any word and started eating. Though he was doubtful about her intentions and was wondering why she stopped him.

After that, Christmas Eve at Ramsjo passed just as it always had. The stranger did not cause any trouble because he did nothing but sleep. The whole forenoon he lay on the sofa in one of the guest rooms and slept at one stretch. At noon they woke him up so that he could have his share of the good Christmas fare, but after that he slept again. It seemed as though for many years he had not been able to sleep as quietly and safely as here at Ramsjo.

The peddler went to sleep after having food. He did not cause harm to anyone and lay down on the sofa in the guest house. He was once woken up in the afternoon but after having his lunch he again went to sleep. It was like as if he had never got the chance to sleep so peacefully as he had got at this place.

In the evening, when the Christmas tree was lighted, they woke him up again, and he stood for a while in the drawing room, blinking as though the candlelight hurt him, but after that he disappeared again. Two hours later he was aroused once more. He then had to go down into the dining room and eat the Christmas fish and porridge.

christmas tree

In the evening, the family woke him as they had to light up the Christmas tree. He stood there blinking as if he was getting hurt by the bright light of the candles. He again went to sleep. Finally they called him again for the dinner of Christmas fish and porridge.

As soon as they got up from the table he went around to each one present and said thank you and good night, but when he came to the young girl she gave him to understand that it was her father's intention that the suit which he wore was to be a Christmas present — he did not have to return it; and if he wanted to spend next Christmas Eve in a place where he could rest in peace, and be sure that no evil would befall him, he would be welcomed back again.

After the dinner was over, the peddler thanked everyone present. The ironmaster's daughter said that the clothes which were given to him were a Christmas present from her father. So, he could carry them with him. She even invited the peddler to be with her family for the next Christmas Eve and promised that nothing bad would happen to him.

The man with the rattaps did not answer anything to this. He only stared at the young girl in boundless amazement. The next morning the ironmaster and his daughter got up in good season to go to the early Christmas service. Their guest was still asleep, and they did not disturb him.

Boundless: limitless

Amazement: wonder

The peddler did not have an answer for this and stared at the girl with wonder. Next day both ironmaster and his daughter went for the Christmas service early in the morning. They didn't disturb their guest as he was asleep.

When, at about ten o'clock, they drove back from the church, the young girl sat and hung her head even more dejectedly than usual. At church she had learned that one of the old crofters of the ironworks had been robbed by a man who went around selling rattaps. "Yes, that was a fine fellow you let into the house," said her father. "I only wonder how many silver spoons are left in the cupboard by this time."

Dejected: sad

Both iron master and his daughter had come to know that a rattap seller had stolen money from the old crofter. They realized that he was the same man whom they had over as a guest. The ironmaster said that it was his daughter who insisted to give shelter to a thief and was wondering that how many silver spoons had been stolen by him.

the wagon

The wagon had hardly stopped at the front steps when the ironmaster asked the valet whether the stranger was still there. He added that he had heard at church that the man was a thief. The valet answered that the fellow had gone and that he had not taken anything with him at all. On the contrary, he had left behind a little package which Miss Willmansson was to be kind enough to accept as a Christmas present.

The ironmaster, on reaching home enquired about the peddler from the valet. He also told him that he was a thief. To his surprise, the valet told him that the peddler, instead of taking something had left a small Christmas gift for Miss Willmansson.

The young girl opened the package, which was so badly done up that the contents came into view at once. She gave a little cry of joy. She found a small rattrap, and in it lay three wrinkled ten kronor notes. But that was not all. In the rattrap lay also a letter written in large, jagged characters —

“Honoured and noble Miss, “Since you have been so nice to me all day long, as if I was a captain, I want to be nice to you, in return, as if I was a real captain — for I do not want you to be embarrassed at this Christmas season by a thief; but you can give back the money to the old man on the roadside, who has the money pouch hanging on the window frame as a bait for poor wanderers. “The rattrap is a Christmas present from a rat who would have been caught in this world’s rattrap if he had not been raised to captain, because in that way he got power to clear himself.“Written with friendship and high regard,
“Captain von Stahle.”

The ironmaster’s daughter opened the gift. It was so roughly packed that she could easily guess what was inside the pack. Apart from a rattrap and three kronor notes, there was a letter. The peddler had thanked his host who had taken care of him as if he was a real captain. In return, he gifted her a rattrap and also requested her to return the stolen money to the old man. He said that it was she who let him free from the rattrap by raising his status from that of a mere peddler to that of a Captain. At last, he undersigned as Captain Von Stahle..