



Introduction

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Chapter 4: The Rattrap

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Chapter 4: The Rattrap

Summary

1. The Rattrap Peddler and his Thoughts About the World:

Once upon a time, there was a vagabond who went around selling small rattraps. He made them from the material he got by begging. The business was not profitable, so he had to beg and even steal to survive. His clothes were in rags, his cheeks were sunken and hunger gleamed in his eyes.

While he was engrossed in his thoughts about rattraps one day, a very amusing thought came to his mind that the world was a big rattrap. It offered comforts and joys just like the rattrap offered cheese and pork. As soon as a rat was tempted to touch the bait, it trapped him.

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2. The Crofter Treats the Peddler Nicely but the Peddler Cheats him:

One dark evening, as the peddler was trudging along the road, he went to a small grey cottage, seeking shelter for the night. The owner, who had once been a crofter, not only invited him in, but was happy to get someone to talk to. The crofter, who had no wife or children, was very talkative and shared much about himself with the peddler. He informed the peddler that during his days of prosperity, he worked at the Ramsjö Ironworks.

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Now, his cow supported him. He even shared the fact that he had earned thirty kronor by selling the cow's milk. The guest seemed incredulous, so the crofter showed him the money, also revealing where it was kept. Next day, both left the cottage at the same time. But, half an hour later the peddler returned. He went up to the window, smashed a pane and took out the thirty kronor from the pouch in which they were kept.

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3. The Vagabond is Pleased with his Smartness; Gets Lost in the Woods:

The vagabond was quite pleased with his smartness. He avoided the public highway and turned into the wood, as he felt he would be safer and no one would be able to catch him. It was a big and confusing forest. He tried to walk in a definite direction, but the paths twisted back and forth so strangely that he was confused. He walked on and on and soon realised that he had been walking around in the same part of the forest.

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All at once, he recalled his thoughts about the world being a rattrap. Now, his own turn had come. He had let himself be fooled by the bait and had been caught in a rattrap. The entire forest, with its trees, trunks and branches, seemed to him like a prison that offered no escape.

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4. The Peddler Meets the Ironmaster; Declines his Invitation:

Finally, the peddler saw no way out. He was so overwhelmed with exhaustion that he sank down to the ground, tired to death, thinking that his last moment had come. Just then, he heard the sound of the regular thumping of a hammer. He realised that the sound was coming from an iron mill. He summoned all his strength and walked in the direction of the sound.

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He reached the Ramsjö Ironworks, which was then a large plant with smelter, rolling mill and forge. He entered the ironworks amidst the different sounds coming from the work going on in full swing. It was quite usual for persons like him to be attracted by the warmth and shelter of the forge, so he was ignored by the blacksmiths. The master blacksmith rather haughtily granted him permission to stay.

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Soon, the ironmaster came into the forge for his inspection and noticed the peddler. He mistook him in the dim light for an old regimental comrade and addressed him as Nils Olof. The peddler didn't try to clear his doubt, as he thought the ironmaster might give him some money. The ironmaster invited him home. The peddler thought that going to the manor house would be like 'throwing himself voluntarily into the lion's den'. So, he declined the invitation.

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5. Ironmaster Sends his Daughter Edla to Persuade the Peddler:

The ironmaster assumed that the Peddler felt embarrassed because of his miserable clothing. He tried to comfort the peddler by informing him that there was nothing to be ashamed about. He further told him that his wife Elizabeth was dead, his sons were settled abroad and he lived with his daughter Edla. But the tramp constantly refused to go with him.

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The ironmaster went away, but he was not deterred by the peddler's persistent refusal. He sent his daughter to persuade the peddler. When Edla came to the ironworks, she found the man alarmed and frightened.

She tried to comfort him. She somehow sensed that his fear conveyed that he was either a thief on the run or an escaped prisoner. Still, she was very friendly and kind to the peddler. The peddler felt confidence in her and accepted the invitation. He felt guilty and cursed himself for stealing the crofter's money.

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6. Edla Expresses her Doubts About the Peddler:

The next day was Christmas Eve. The ironmaster was happy that he would be spending his time with an old friend. He told Edla that they needed to feed him well and provide him with a better business than selling rattraps. Edla said that she was doubtful about the peddler, as he didn't display the slightest sign of being educated. However, the ironmaster told her to have some patience. Just then the door opened and the stranger entered the room. He was now well groomed. He was wearing clothes which belonged to the ironmaster.

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7. The Ironmaster Gets Angry; the Peddler Retaliates:

The ironmaster realised that the tramp was no friend of his. The peddler made no attempt to delude them any longer. He explained that he never said to the ironmaster that he was Nils Olof. He had even pleaded and begged for not coming to the manor house. He added that no harm had been done and he could put on his rags and go away. The ironmaster said that the peddler had not been very honest and he would take him to the Sheriff. The peddler got agitated. He said that the world was like a big rattrap, and some day the ironmaster would also be tempted to touch the bait and would be doomed. The ironmaster started laughing.

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8. Edla Argues on Behalf of the Peddler:

The ironmaster asked the peddler to leave. But Edla wanted him to stay back. She felt that they had promised the peddler Christmas cheer, and it would be wrong to send him away. The peddler was surprised by this gesture. Edla further added that the peddler must have been through a bad time, as he was always chased away. He could not even sleep unafraid.

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The ironmaster gave in. The peddler was allowed to stay on for Christmas, but the only thing he did was to sleep soundly after that. Once or twice he was woken up to have food but besides that, he only slept. It seemed as though he had never slept as quietly and safely. The ironmaster and Edla gifted him the suit that he was wearing as a Christmas present. She told him that he was welcome to spend even the next Christmas with them. The peddler kept staring at her in boundless amazement.

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9. The Peddler Becomes a Changed Man:

The next morning the ironmaster and his daughter went to the church for Christmas service, leaving the peddler at home. They returned home and Edla was very sad. At the church, they had learned that a rattrap peddler robbed an old crofter who once worked at their Ramsjö Ironworks.

The ironmaster was furious

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They thought that by the time they would reach home, the peddler would have escaped with all their silver and other valuables. When they got home, the ironmaster asked the valet if the peddler was still there. The valet informed him that the fellow had left but he had not taken anything with him. Instead, he had left something for Edla. Edla opened the package and found a rattrap. In the rattrap were three wrinkled ten kronor notes and a letter.

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The peddler had written that since Edla had treated him like a real captain, he also wanted to be nice to her. He wanted the money to be returned to the crofter. He further wrote that he would not have been able to escape the rattrap, if he had not been raised to the status of a captain. He even signed the letter as 'Captain von Stahle'. He was a changed man.

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Conclusion

To sum up, The Rattrap summary, we learn that we can change the world through kindness and compassion; in addition, it teaches us that materialistic things never bring inner joy, only love and respect does.

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