

- The Rattrap Introduction
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The Rattrap Introduction

The Rattrap is a short story written by the Swedish author Selma Lagerlof. It narrates the life of a homeless tramp who sells rattraps and his experiences with kindness and trust. The story explores the tramp's philosophy that the world itself is a rattrap, where people are lured by material possessions such as land, food, and shelter, much like rats are lured into traps by bait.

The story highlights themes of love, compassion, human dignity, and the transformative power of kindness. The title metaphorically represents the human predicament, suggesting that most people are prone to fall into the trap of materialism.

Key Elements

- **Theme:** Love, compassion, human dignity, and transformation through kindness.
- **Philosophy:** The world as a rattrap where people are tempted by material baits.
- **Characters:** The rattrap seller (homeless tramp), the lonely crofter, the ironmaster, and his daughter Edla.

Textual Evidence

The tramp reflects, "As rats are lured by pork and cheese to enter the trap, so are men lured by land, food, shelter, clothing, etc." This metaphor underlines the central idea of the

story.

Practice Set

- **Level 1:** Who is the author of The Rattrap?
- **Level 2:** Explain the metaphor of the world as a rattrap.
- **Level 3:** Discuss how the theme of compassion is portrayed in the story.

Answer Key

- **Level 1:** Selma Lagerlof is the author of The Rattrap.
- **Level 2:** The world is compared to a rattrap where people are tempted by material things, which act as bait, leading them into traps of greed and desire.
- **Level 3:** Compassion is shown through the kindness of the crofter and Edla, the ironmaster's daughter, who treat the tramp with trust and generosity, leading to his transformation.

Quick Reference

- **Author:** Selma Lagerlof
- **Theme:** Compassion and human dignity
- **Setting:** A cold December evening, a lonely crofter's cottage, and the ironmaster's forge

Glossary

- **Rattrap:** A trap used to catch rats.
- **Philosopher:** A person who thinks deeply about life and human nature.
- **Compassion:** Sympathy and concern for the sufferings of others.

The Rattrap Summary

The story begins with a rattrap peddler who leads a lonely life and believes the world is a rattrap. On a cold December evening, he finds shelter in a lonely crofter's cottage. The crofter welcomes him warmly, offering food and tobacco, and shares details about his life and money kept in a pouch hanging on the window.

After the crofter leaves, the peddler steals the money by breaking the window pane. Feeling unsafe, he hides in the forest, which he also sees as a rattrap. Eventually, he reaches the Ramsjö Iron Works, where the ironmaster mistakes him for an old regimental comrade, Captain von Stahle, and invites him home for Christmas.

The ironmaster's daughter, Edla, persuades the peddler to accept the invitation. At the ironmaster's home, the peddler is bathed, dressed in fine clothes, and treated with respect. However, the ironmaster later realizes the peddler is not his old friend and considers turning him away.

Edla insists on kindness, and the peddler is allowed to stay. He receives Christmas gifts and feels grateful. The next day, the ironmaster and Edla learn that the peddler had stolen money from the crofter. They fear their silver might be stolen too.

However, the peddler leaves a Christmas present for Edla—a small rattrap—and returns the stolen money with a letter thanking her for her kindness. He signs the letter as Captain von Stahle, showing that her kindness helped him escape the metaphorical rattrap of his life.

Key Elements

- **Plot:** The journey of the peddler from loneliness and theft to transformation through kindness.
- **Characters:** The peddler, the crofter, the ironmaster, and Edla.
- **Setting:** The crofter's cottage, the forest, and the ironmaster's home during Christmas.

Textual Evidence

"He thought that the world was a rattrap and that he too might be tempted by a big bait while getting caught in the trap." This line reveals the peddler's worldview and internal conflict.

Practice Set

- **Level 1:** What did the crofter offer the peddler?
- **Level 2:** Why did the ironmaster mistake the peddler for Captain von Stahle?
- **Level 3:** How did Edla's kindness influence the peddler's actions?

Answer Key

- **Level 1:** The crofter offered the peddler hot porridge and tobacco.
- **Level 2:** The ironmaster thought the peddler resembled his old regimental comrade and invited him home.
- **Level 3:** Edla's kindness made the peddler feel valued and inspired him to return the stolen money and leave a gift, showing his transformation.

Quick Reference

- **Setting:** Crofter's cottage, forest, ironmaster's home
- **Characters:** Peddler, crofter, ironmaster, Edla
- **Theme:** Transformation through kindness

Glossary

- **Crofter:** A person who lives and works on a small farm.
- **Forge:** A blacksmith's workshop.
- **Regimental comrade:** A fellow soldier in the same regiment.