

- A Question of Trust Summary

A Question of Trust Summary

"A Question of Trust" by Victor Canning is a short story that explores themes of trust, deception, and overconfidence. The story revolves around Horace Danby, a fifty-year-old expert lock maker and a habitual thief who has previously served time in prison for stealing jewels. Despite his criminal past, Horace is careful and considers himself trustworthy in his dishonest dealings.

Horace plans a burglary at a house called Shot over Grange, where he expects to steal jewels worth fifteen thousand pounds to fund his passion for rare and expensive books. After studying the house and its occupants' routines, he breaks in when the family is away. However, his plan is disrupted when a young woman, posing as the mistress of the house, unexpectedly arrives. She tricks Horace into opening the safe for her by pretending to have forgotten the combination and needing the jewels for a party.

Horace complies, but soon after, he is arrested because his fingerprints are found on the safe. The woman turns out to be an older thief who deceived him. The story highlights how misplaced trust and overconfidence can lead to downfall, and how deception can come full circle.

Key Elements

- **Characters:** Horace Danby (the thief), the woman posing as the mistress of the house (the deceiver)
- **Themes:** Trust and deception, overconfidence, consequences of dishonesty

- **Setting:** Shot over Grange, a house targeted for burglary
- **Plot:** A planned burglary turns into a trap due to deception

Important Vocabulary

- **Pacified:** Brought to peace or calmed down
- **Posed:** Presented oneself in a particular way
- **Shudder:** Tremble with fear or disgust
- **Pledged:** Promised solemnly
- **Consented:** Agreed to do something

Textual Evidence

When Horace "pacified the pet dog by addressing it with love," it shows his careful and calm approach to avoid suspicion. The woman "posed to be the mistress of the house," indicating her deceptive nature. Horace's "shudder" at the thought of prison reveals his fear and vulnerability despite his criminal background.

Practice Set

Level 1 – Easy

- Who is Horace Danby and what is his profession?
- Why did Horace choose the house at Shot over Grange for his burglary?

Level 2 – Moderate

- Describe how the woman deceived Horace Danby.
- What does the story suggest about trust and overconfidence?

Level 3 – Challenging

- Analyze the theme of deception in "A Question of Trust" with examples from the story.
- Discuss the irony in Horace Danby's character and his downfall.

Answer Key

Level 1 – Easy

- Horace Danby is a fifty-year-old expert lock maker and a thief.
- He chose the house because the family was away in London and the servants were at the movies, making it an opportune target.

Level 2 – Moderate

- The woman pretended to be the mistress of the house and convinced Horace to open the safe for her by saying she forgot the combination and needed the jewels for a party.
- The story suggests that misplaced trust and overconfidence can lead to one's downfall, as even a criminal like Horace was deceived.

Level 3 – Challenging

- Deception is central to the story; the woman's false identity and manipulation of Horace's trust lead to his arrest, showing how trust can be exploited.
- Horace is ironic because although he is a thief, he considers himself trustworthy and careful, yet his overconfidence causes him to be tricked and caught.

Quick Reference

- Horace Danby: Expert lock maker and thief
- Theme: Trust, deception, overconfidence
- Setting: Shot over Grange house
- Outcome: Horace is deceived and arrested

Glossary

- **Trust:** Reliance on the integrity or ability of a person
- **Deception:** The act of deceiving or misleading
- **Overconfidence:** Excessive confidence leading to mistakes
- **Burglary:** Illegal entry into a building to commit theft
- **Fingerprint:** Unique patterns on fingers used for identification

Prepzy