

The Beggar

by Anton Chekhov

Chapter Sketch

'The Beggar' is a story about a drunkard beggar named Lushkoff. Sergei (An advocate) gives him work at his house so that he can feed himself and stop begging. Although he agrees, he is not willing to work. The work given to him is done by Olga (Sergei's cook) as she feels pity on his miserable condition. He goes to another place for work as recommended by Sergei and becomes a Notary. Sergei meets him after 2 years and is happy to know about his new job. He thinks that he is responsible for changing him but he tells him that it was Olga's kindness and unconditional help that had made him change his ways.

About the Characters

Lushkoff He is a drunkard beggar. He does not want to do any work and tells lies so that people may feel pity on his condition and give him alms. In the end he is changed person due to Olga's unconditional support.

Sergei He is an advocate. He meets Lushkoff and gives him work at his house. He thinks that he has changed Lushkoff.

Olga She is a cook who works at Sergei's house. She feels pity on the miserable condition of Lushkoff and does all his work. She cries for him and chops wood for him unconditionally. It is due to her kindness that Lushkoff changes his ways in the end and becomes a successful notary.

Summary of the Chapter

Sergei Meets the Beggar

Sergei meets a beggar who wants him to take pity on him. His name is Lushkoff and he tells him that he was a schoolteacher in a village.

He further adds that he is jobless since a year now and although he has got a job offer in a different province, he does not have money to go there.

Sergei Recognises the Beggar

When Sergei looks at him closely he remembers that he had met him at a different street two days ago.

The beggar was posing as a student then. The beggar (Lushkoff) denies that it was not him but Sergei tells him that he is a cheat and threatens to call the police. Lushkoff then admits that it was him and says that he has to tell lies so that people take pity on him and give money or things to him.

Sergei Takes him to his House

Sergei takes him to his house and gives him the job of chopping wood. Though Lushkoff is not willing to work, he agrees to do the work. He is called first day of every month to chop wood and is given half a Rouble.

However, he starts coming at Sergei's house regularly and whenever he comes, some work is assigned to him. All his work is done by Olga (the cook at Sergei's house) as she feels pity on his miserable condition.

However, she does not tell this to Sergei. Lushkoff is happy to get paid without doing any work.

The Beggar Goes to Work for Sergei's Friend

Sergei is happy to see Lushkoff coming regularly at his home. He thinks that he is working and asks him to go to his friend's place where he can get a writing job. He is pleased at having put Lushkoff on the right path and gives him a letter that needs to be handed to his friend. Lushkoff agrees and goes there.

Sergei and Lushkoff Meet After Two Years

Sergei and Lushkoff meet after two years at a theatre. Sergei asks about him and he tells that he has become a Notary now and is paid 35 roubles per month. Sergei is happy to know that and takes the credit for changing his life.

However, Lushkoff thanks him for his help and tells the truth. He says that Olga is responsible for his change as she used to do all the work assigned to him. Her unconditional help and concern for him made him change his ways. Lushkoff then takes a leave from Sergei as the show was about to start.

» Chapter Highlights

- 1 Sergei (An advocate) meets a drunkard beggar named Lushkoff.
- 2 Lushkoff tells him that he has to beg as he has no work to do.
- 3 Sergei gives him the work of chopping wood at his house.
- 4 Although Lushkoff does not want to work, he goes with Sergei.
- 5 Olga (Sergei's cook) sees Lushkoff's miserable condition and helps him by doing his work.
- 6 Lushkoff is happy to get paid without doing any work. He keeps on coming at Sergei's house regularly.
- 7 After some time, Lushkoff is sent to a different place to do writing work.
- 8 He mends his ways and works hard to become a Notary.
- 9 Sergei meets him after 2 years and is happy to see his condition and thinks that he has been changed due to him.
- 10 Lushkoff tells him that it was Olga's unconditional help that made him change his ways.

Word Meanings

The given page nos. correspond to the pages in the prescribed textbook.

| Word | Meaning |
|----------------|--|
| PAGE 62 | |
| swear | a solemn declaration by some sacred being or object |
| lodging | temporary accommodation |
| copeck | a monetary unit of Russia equal to one-hundredth of a rouble |
| calumny | defamation of character |
| advocate | lawyer |

| Word | Meaning |
|-----------|---|
| ragged | (of clothes) old and torn |
| suppliant | a person making a humble plea to someone in power or authority. |
| province | district; region |
| mendicant | a beggar |
| overshoes | a shoe worn over a normal shoe, typically made of rubber to protect the normal shoe |
| expelled | removed |
| mumble | murmur |
| flushed | (of a person's skin) red and hot, typically as the result of illness or strong emotion. |
| disgust | a feeling of dislike for something or someone. |

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| | |
|-------------|--|
| swindling | cheating |
| choir | an organised group of singers |
| drunkenness | intoxication |
| skilled | experienced |
| hasten | to move or act quickly |
| scarecrow | a person who is very badly dressed, odd-looking, or thin |

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| | |
|------------------------------|--|
| pseudo | not genuine |
| spat (past tense of spit) | eject saliva from one's mouth, sometimes as a gesture of contempt or anger |
| scold | criticise |
| billet | (here) a thick piece of wood. |
| feebly | lacking in force |
| waver | move back and forth |
| menial | (of work) not requiring much skill and lacking prestige. |
| Waif | a homeless, neglected or abandoned person |

PAGE 65

| | |
|--------------|--|
| hauling | pulling or dragging |
| shovel | move something with a shovel (Shovel is a tool with a long handle used for lifting and throwing dirt, sand, snow, etc. |
| irresolutely | hesitantly |
| gait | a person's manner of walking |
| consented | agree to do something |
| undermined | lessen the effectiveness, power or ability of someone |
| toil | work very hard |
| glared | stare in an angry or fierce way |
| wrathfully | extremely Angriily |
| nang | strike or put down something forcefully and noisily |

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| Word | Meaning |
|----------------|--|
| tug | mat |
| dober | serious, sensible and dignified |
| gloomy | sad or depressed |
| pretence | acting |
| jeer | make rude and mocking remarks, typically in a loud voice |
| tattered | old and torn; in poor condition |
| rouble | the basic monetary unit of Russia |
| employment | the state of having paid work |
| tapped | to strike lightly |
| parting | leaving |
| notary | a person authorised to perform certain legal formalities |
| timidly | unconfidently |
| PAGE 66 | |
| delighted | very happy |
| roasting | severe criticism |

| Word | Meaning |
|----------------|---|
| grateful | thankful |
| noble | having or showing fine personal qualities or high moral principles. |
| indebted | owing something (such as money or thanks) to someone |
| strictly | rightly |
| sot | a habitual drunkard |
| miserable | being in a pitiable state of distress or unhappiness |
| strain | an outburst filled with emotional speech |
| ruin | a state of complete destruction |
| PAGE 67 | |
| sight | view, glimpse |
| owing | due |
| bow | to bend the head or body in respect to someone or something |

NCERT FOLDER

(Here we have covered questions given in the NCERT textbook along with their answers.)

Think About it (Page 67, 68)

- 1 Has Lushkoff become a beggar by circumstance or choice?

Ans. Lushkoff became a beggar by choice as he did not want to work. He was a drunkard and was thrown out of the choir he sang due to drunkenness.

- 2 What reasons does he give to Sergei for his telling lies?

Ans. He told Sergei that he cannot get along without lying. He also said that nobody would take pity on him and give him anything if he told the truth.

- 3 Is Lushkoff a willing worker? Why, then, does he agree to chop wood for Sergei?

Ans. No, Lushkoff is not a willing worker. He agrees to chop wood for Sergei as he lied to him that he had to beg as he cannot find any work.

- 4 Sergei says, "I am happy that my words have taken effect." Why does he say so? Is he right in saying this?

Ans. Sergei says that on seeing Lushkoff coming to his house regularly for work. He means to say that Lushkoff is coming to work regularly at his home as he had urged him to leave begging and start working.

No, he is not right in saying so as Lushkoff did not do any work at his place and all his work was done by Olga (the cook of Sergei).

- 5 Lushkoff is earning thirty five roubles a month. How is he obliged to Sergei for this?

Ans. Lushkoff is obliged to Sergei for this as it was at Sergei's house that he met Olga. Olga did all his work and used to weep for his miserable condition. This led Lushkoff to mend his ways and start working diligently.

- 6 During their conversation Lushkoff reveals that Sergei's cook, Olga, is responsible for the positive change in him. How has Olga saved Lushkoff?

Ans. Olga has saved Lushkoff as she used to feel pity on his miserable condition and did all the work assigned to him unconditionally. This made Lushkoff to quit drinking and start working.

Exam Practice

Extract Based Questions

[4 Marks each]

Read the following extracts carefully and choose the correct option.

1 The advocate, Sergei, looked at the ragged, fawn-coloured overcoat of the suppliant, at his dull, drunken eyes, at the red spot on either cheek, and it seemed to him as if he had seen this man somewhere before.

- (i) Who is 'his' in the extract?
(a) Sergei (b) Lushkoff
(b) Olga's brother (d) Olga's husband
- (ii) Where did Sergei see him before?
(a) Sergei saw him begging in a different city
(b) Sergei saw him begging in a different street
(c) Sergei saw him sleeping in a cabin
(d) Sergei saw him stealing in a different street
- (iii) Find a word from the extract which means 'A person making a humble plea to someone in power or authority'.
(a) Beggar (b) Suppliant
(c) Supplier (d) Suppliant
- (iv) What is the opposite of 'dull'?
(a) Blighted (b) Dusky
(c) Bright (d) Blooper

- Ans. (i) (b) Lushkoff
(ii) (b) Sergei saw him begging in a different street
(iii) (d) Suppliant
(iv) (c) Bright

2 Next he saw the pseudo-traitor seat himself on a log and become lost in thought with his red cheeks resting on his fists. The woman flung down an axe at his feet, spat angrily, and, judging from the expression on her lips, began to scold him.

- (i) Who is the 'woman' mentioned in the extract?
(a) Olga (b) Sergei's mother
(c) Sergei's daughter (d) Olga's mother
- (ii) Why is he called a pseudo-traitor?
(a) As he used to be a teacher earlier
(b) As he used to be a professor earlier
(c) As he lied that he was a teacher
(d) As he lied that he was a farmer
- (iii) Give the present tense of the word 'spat'.
(a) Spate (b) Spake (c) Spitted (d) Spit
- (iv) What is the present tense of 'flung'?
(a) Flang (b) Flinged
(c) Fling (d) Flangs

- Ans. (i) (a) Olga
(ii) (c) As he lied that he was a teacher
(iii) (d) Spit
(iv) (c) Fling

3 On the first of the month the waif made his appearance and again earned half a rouble, although he could barely stand on his legs. From that day on he often appeared in the yard and every time work was found for him.

- (i) Who is the 'waif' in the extract?
(a) Sergei (b) Sergei's servant
(c) Lushkoff (d) Olga's husband
- (ii) Why is the waif given half a rouble?
(a) For chopping wood at Sergei's house
(b) For cleaning Sergei's house
(c) For washing Sergei's clothes
(d) For entertaining Sergei
- (iii) Find a word from the extract that means 'hardly'.
(a) Barely (b) Slowly
(c) Scarcely (d) Evenly
- (iv) The word 'again' in the extract is a/an
(a) Adjective (b) Adverb
(c) Preposition (d) Conjunction

- Ans. (i) (c) Lushkoff
(ii) (a) For chopping wood at Sergei's house
(iii) (a) Barely
(iv) (b) Adverb

4 Thank Heaven! That's fine! I am delighted for your sake. I am very, very glad Lushkoff. You see, you are my godson, in a sense. I gave you a push along the right path, you know. Do you remember what a roasting I gave you, eh?

- (i) Who is 'I' in the extract?
(a) Lushkoff (b) Sergei
(c) Olga (d) Lushkoff's friend
- (ii) Why is 'I' delighted?
(a) As Lushkoff has stopped drinking
(b) As Lushkoff has started drinking
(c) As Lushkoff has stopped begging and become a doctor
(d) As Lushkoff has stopped begging and become a notary

(iii) The word 'sake' in the extract is a

- (a) Noun (b) Verb
(c) Preposition (d) Conjunction

(iv) What does 'delighted' mean?

- (a) Happy (b) Very pleased
(c) Sad (d) Shocked

Ans. (i) (b) Sergei

(ii) (d) As Lushkoff has stopped begging and become a notary

(iii) (a) Noun

(iv) (b) Very pleased

Short Answer (SA) Type Questions

[2 Marks each]

1 Describe the appearance of the beggar.

Ans. The beggar was old, had dull, drunken eyes and a red spot on his either cheek. He wore ragged clothes and one of his overshoes was higher than the other. He appeared to be in the utmost poverty and misery. His face was supportive of the misery he wanted to put on.

2 What plea did the beggar make before Sergei?

Ans. The beggar pleaded Sergei to have pity on him as he was poor and hungry. He also said that he was jobless, had nothing to eat for three days and didn't have money for lodging. He put on the expression of misery and depravity on his face so that someone could have pity on him and give him money.

3 Why did Sergei threaten to call the police?

Ans. Sergei threatened to call the police as the beggar, Lushkoff, was lying. He was posing as an expelled student and a jobless schoolteacher at different instances in order to get money from people. Since, he was cheating; so Sergei threatened him.

4 What job was given to Lushkoff? Why did he agree to do it?

Ans. Lushkoff was given the job of chopping wood by Sergei. He agreed to do it as he had lied that he had to beg as he did not have a job. But, now he had been offered work, he couldn't deny it.

5 Describe the initial behaviour of Olga towards the beggar.

Ans. Olga glared angrily at the beggar and shoved him aside with her elbow. Then she flung down an axe at his feet, spat angrily and scolded him. She kept on cursing him all the time for his drunkenness and scolded him.

6 What different kinds of work did Lushkoff do at Sergei's house?

Ans. Lushkoff chopped wood, shovelled snow, put the wood-shed in order, beat the dust out of rugs and mattresses and helped in the packing and moving of the furniture at Sergei's house.

7 Why did Sergei send Lushkoff to his friend? What advice did he give to him?

Ans. Sergei sent Lushkoff to his friend so that he can get some cleaner employment and won't have to do menial labour. He advised him to work hard and not to drink. He wanted him to be successful at his work.

8 Who saved the beggar? How?

Ans. Olga, the cook of Sergei, saved the beggar. She used to do all his work and criticised him severely. She also cried looking at his miserable condition. Seeing all this, the beggar mended his ways and stopped drinking.

Long Answer (LA) Type Questions

[8 Marks each]

1 Describe Sergei's meeting with the beggar.

Ans. Sergei met Lushkoff (the beggar) on a street. Lushkoff was posing as a village schoolteacher and pleaded him to show mercy on him. Sergei looked at him. When he saw his overshoes, one of which was high and the other low, he remembered that he had met him earlier.

He confronted Lushkoff and told him that when he had met him earlier, he was posing as a student.

Lushkoff was taken aback and said that it was not him.

Sergei called him a liar and a dishonest person and threatened to call the police. This made Lushkoff admit that he was lying. He told him that he is neither a schoolteacher nor a student. He said that he sang in a Russian choir and was expelled for drunkenness. He also explained that if he told the truth no one would give him anything.

When Lushkoff urged him to work he said that he cannot find any work. So, he offered him the work of chopping wood at his house. Although he did not want to work, he accepted his offer and went with him to his house.

2 Give a character sketch of Lushkoff.

Lushkoff was an old, drunkard beggar. He had dull drunken eyes and a red spot on either cheek. He used to tell lies so that people would take pity on him and give him money. He did not want to work and was thrown out of the Russian choir, where he sang earlier, for drunkenness.

Lushkoff accepted Sergei's offer to work due to pride and shame. He hardly did any work at Sergei's home and was greatly helped by Olga (Sergei's cook) in completing his assigned tasks. He was moved by Olga's concern for him and the unconditional help rendered by her to him. This made him change and he left drinking and started working hard. He was also a grateful person as he was indebted to Sergei and Olga for their help. (He had a good willpower as changing one's habits in old age is very difficult.)

3 "You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink."

Justify the above proverb with reference to the story "The Beggar".

Ans. The story 'The Beggar' justifies the proverb "You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink." Lushkoff, the beggar, is an old, drunkard man. He has taken to begging as he is not willing to work. Sergei helps him by giving him the job of chopping wood at his house and thinks that he would change his ways. However, Lushkoff has no intention to change and does not do any work. All his work is done by Olga, Sergei's cook. He keeps on coming at Sergei's house so that he can get money without doing any work and uses it for drinking.

It was only when he sees Olga's concern for him and her unconditional help that moves something in him and makes him change his ways. He leaves drinking and starts working hard. It is due to his own willpower that he quits drinking and becomes a better person and not due to the request or forcing of someone else. Hence, the proverb is justified with reference to the story.

Self Assessment

Extract Based Question

Read the following extract carefully and choose the correct option.

- 1 Kind sir, have pity; turn your attention to a poor, hungry man! For three days I have had nothing to eat; I haven't five copecks for a lodging, I swear it before God.
- (i) Who said the above lines and to whom?
- (a) Lushkoff to Sergei's brother ☒ (b) Lushkoff to Sergei
(c) Lushkoff to Olga's husband (d) Lushkoff to Olga's brother
- (ii) What are copecks?
- (a) Indian coin (b) German coin
☒ (c) Russian coin (d) French coin
- (iii) Find a word from the extract which means 'mercy'.
- ☒ (a) Pity (b) Kindness
(c) Compassion (d) Leniency
- (iv) 'Fire' in the extract is a/an
- (a) Adjective (b) Pronoun
(c) Adverb ☒ (d) Noun

Short Answer (SA) Type Questions

- 2 Who was Sergei? Why does he help the beggar?
- 3 What did the beggar tell people to get money?
- 4 Give a character sketch of Sergei.
- 5 Why did the other make fun of Lushkoff?

Long Answer (LA) Type Questions

- 6 Give a character sketch of Olga.
- 7 Describe the values highlighted in the story 'The Beggar'.