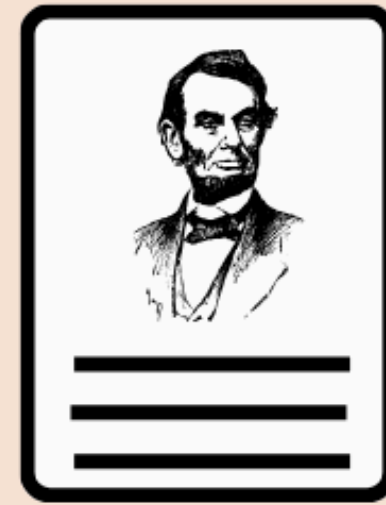


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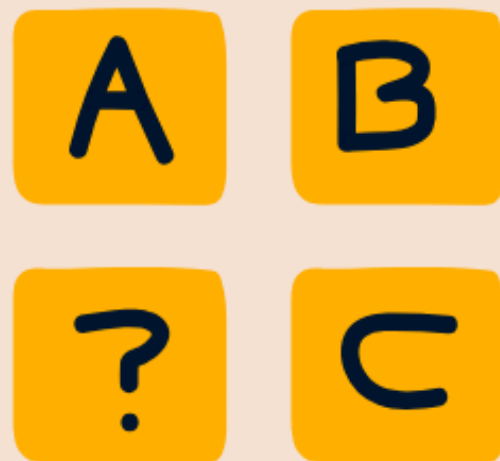
English Notes



**Full
Explanations**



**Character
Sketch**



**Word
Meanings**



**Tone, Central
idea, devices....**

Footprints without Feet

4. A Question of Trust

Chapter Explanation

The story A Question of Trust by Victor Canning shows the **ironic downfall** of Horace Danby, a man who looks completely respectable but secretly lives as a thief. Horace is around **fifty, unmarried, suffering from hay fever, and runs a successful lock-making business**, which makes his criminal side even more ironic because a maker of locks becomes a breaker of safes. He is **not** shown as **violent or greedy** in a usual way; instead, he is a cultured man with a strong liking for **rare and expensive books**, and he steals only once in a year to support this habit. This contrast in his personality builds the central irony of the story. On a bright July day, Horace prepares confidently to rob the safe at **Shotover Grange** after studying the house, its wiring, garden, and routine for two weeks. His preparation shows he is careful, systematic, and intelligent. He knows the servants are away at the movies, notices the key hanging outside, and wears gloves to avoid fingerprints. He even calms the small dog, Sherry, by calling its name, showing his experience and composure. Inside, the safe is hidden behind a painting in the drawing room. The setting contains visual imagery through details like flowers, painting, neat tools, and silence of the house, helping the reader imagine the scene clearly. Horace feels people are careless about their valuables, which becomes important because a magazine article had described the room and even mentioned the hidden safe.

Just when Horace begins his work, a bowl of flowers triggers his hay fever, and this small weakness becomes the turning point. The flowers are symbolically important because something delicate defeats a man who had outsmarted locks and alarms. As Horace sneezes, a young, pretty woman dressed in **red** appears at the doorway. Her calm, firm, and slightly amused behaviour **gives her authority** at once. She talks like the lady of the house, scolds the dog naturally, and **moves confidently**, so Horace assumes she belongs there. Their conversation shows Horace's **fear of prison** and his **attempt to justify his theft** by saying he steals only from rich people for a "good reason." This reveals his **self-deception**: he tries to see himself as morally different, though he is still a criminal. The woman quickly understands his weakness and invents a story that she forgot the safe's combination and needs jewels for a party. Her behaviour shows careful deception, and the reader senses dramatic irony, as she seems too perfect to be fully trustworthy. Yet Horace, flattered and desperate, ends up trusting her.

The woman's trick works fully. When she picks up a cigarette, Horace removes his gloves and gives her a lighter, and this becomes a fatal mistake because it leaves fingerprints. Then, wanting to help her and avoid trouble, he opens the safe and hands over the jewels. ...

Thinking he has escaped, he leaves happily. But the story takes a sharp ironic turn when Horace is arrested the next day for the robbery at Shotover Grange.

His fingerprints are found everywhere, and his explanation is not believed because the real lady of the house is actually a **gray-haired, sharp-tongued woman of sixty**, not the young woman he met. The young lady was herself a thief, “in the same profession” as Horace, and she cleverly used his skills for her own crime. The ending shows strong situational irony: the thief who trusted his own intelligence is trapped because he trusted another thief. It also breaks the idea of “**honour among thieves.**” By the end, Horace is again in prison working as an **assistant librarian**, thinking bitterly about the woman who fooled him. The title A Question of Trust becomes meaningful because it shows that wrong trust leads to destruction.

Detailed Character Sketches

Horace Danby

Horace Danby is a complex character. Outwardly, he is a **respectable, middle-aged** lock-maker with a successful business, but inwardly he is **dishonest**. The line “good and respectable — but not completely honest” explains his **dual nature**. He is **intelligent, patient**, and **careful**, shown by his planning of the robbery. Unlike typical criminals, he is not cruel and steals only once a year for his **love of books**. This makes him cultured yet morally weak. He is also self-deceptive, trying to justify his crime as different from others. However, he has weaknesses. His **hay fever** distracts him, and his fear of prison makes him trust the woman easily. In the end, he is defeated by someone smarter. Thus, he is intelligent but not wise enough.

Young Lady Thief

The young lady is the most **clever** character. She appears **calm, confident, attractive**, and socially refined, helping her create a false identity. Her behaviour with the dog and her confident tone make her lie believable. She quickly understands Horace’s fear and uses it to control him. Her line, “I have always liked the wrong kind of people,” shows fake sympathy while serving her purpose. She is manipulative, bold, and intelligent. Without using force, she makes Horace open the safe and leave evidence. She is also a professional thief, “in the same profession.” Her success proves she is more intelligent and dangerous than Horace.

Real Lady of the House

The real lady appears only at the end but is important. She is described as a “gray-haired, sharp-tongued woman of sixty.” This sharply contrasts with the young lady in red, showing how badly Horace was deceived. Her presence confirms the truth and destroys Horace’s defence. Though her role is small, she is important for the twist.

Central Message

The story shows that crime cannot be justified by personal reasons or cleverness. Horace thinks his love for books makes his theft acceptable, but the story proves dishonesty remains wrong. It also shows that overconfidence is dangerous. Even careful planning can fail due to one weakness. Most importantly, it rejects “honour among thieves” and shows that trusting dishonest people leads to betrayal.

Narrator's Tone

The tone is light, ironic, observant, and slightly humorous. Horace is not shown with hatred but with mild amusement. At the same time, the narrator exposes his foolishness and irony of his defeat. The tone is engaging while also carrying a moral message.

Word Meanings

1. Hay fever – allergy affecting nose and throat.
2. Respectable – socially acceptable.
3. Sentence – legal punishment.
4. Rare – uncommon.
5. Agent – person acting for another.
6. Robbery – act of stealing.
7. Servants – household workers.
8. Jewels – precious ornaments.
9. Fingerprint – mark of finger pattern.
10. Burglar alarm – warning device.
11. Hindering – causing difficulty.
12. Treatment – medical care.
13. Firmness – confidence in behaviour.
14. Inconvenience – trouble caused.
15. Desperate – without hope.
16. Society – organized community.
17. Protected – kept safe.
18. Persuaded – convinced.
19. Ornaments – decorative items.
20. Mended – repaired.
21. Culprit – person responsible for crime.
22. Sharp-tongued – harsh speaking.
23. Profession – occupation (used ironically).
24. Tricked – deceived cleverly.
25. Honour – honesty.
26. Grange – country house.
27. Meticulous – very careful.
28. Amused – entertained.

Reference Information:

1. **Horace Danby's public image:** People considered Horace a good and respectable citizen, making his secret life more shocking.
2. **Horace's age and personal life:** About fifty years old, unmarried, living with a housekeeper.
3. **Horace's profession:** A lock-maker with two assistants, creating irony as he uses his skill for crime.
4. **Horace's earlier prison sentence:** Served one sentence about fifteen years earlier in a prison library.
5. **Reason for stealing:** Robs once a year to buy rare and expensive books.
6. **Setting of the robbery:** Shotover Grange, whose owners are away in London while servants remain.
7. **Horace's planning:** Studies the house for two weeks carefully.
8. **Estimated value of the jewels:** Around fifteen thousand pounds, expecting to gain at least five thousand.
9. **Hidden key detail:** Kitchen key left outside, allowing easy entry.
10. **Dog in the kitchen:** Sherry, handled easily by Horace.
11. **Location of the safe:** Hidden behind a poor painting in drawing room.
12. **Cause of Horace's failure:** His hay fever caused by flowers.
13. **The woman's disguise:** She pretends to be the lady of the house.
14. **Major mistake with evidence:** Removing gloves leaves fingerprints.
15. **Real identity of the lady of the house:** A sixty-year-old gray-haired, sharp-tongued woman.
16. **Major conflict:** Human vs law and thief vs thief conflict.
17. **Title significance:** Refers to misplaced trust leading to downfall.
18. **Main irony of the story:** A clever thief is defeated by another more clever thief.

Literary devices:

Irony – thief deceived by another thief; lock-maker becomes criminal.

Imagery – flowers, drawing room, silence, sunlight.

Symbolism – flowers and hay fever represent small weakness.

Contrast – respectable appearance vs dishonest reality.

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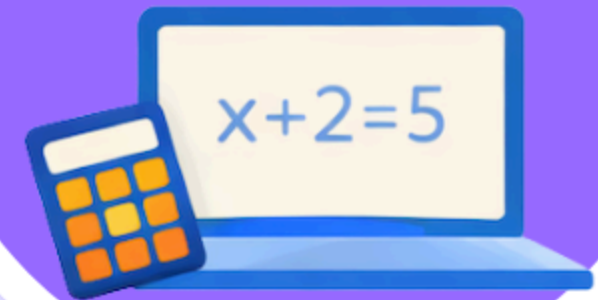
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