

THE BEGGAR

A. Before you read :

- 1) Before you start reading the story, take a close look at the title '**The Beggar**'. What do you think the writer is going to tell us in the story ?
- 2) You must have seen beggars everywhere in our country. Where do you find more beggars ?
- 3) How do you feel when you come across a beggar begging at your door or a beggar requests you for help ?
- 4) Do you like people to beg ? Why ? / Why not ?
- 5) Can we have a society without beggars ? Suggest some ways.

Now read the story to know what the writer tells us about the beggars.

B. The Text

I

"Kind sir, have pity; turn your attention to 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. For eight years I was a village school teacher and then I lost my place through **intrigues**. It is a year now since I have had anything to do."

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 have now had an offer of a position in the province of Kaluga," the mendicant went on. 'But I haven't the money to get there. Help me kindly; I am ashamed to ask, but - I am obliged to by circumstances".

Sergei's eyes fell on the man's overshoes, one of which was high and the other low, and he suddenly remembered something.

"Look here, it seems to me I met you the day before yesterday in Sadovya Street," he said; 'but you told me then that you were a student who had been expelled, and not a village school teacher. Do you remember ?"

"N-no, that can't be so", mumbled the beggar, taken aback. "I am a village school teacher, and if you like I can show you my papers".

"Have done with lying ! You called yourself a student and even told me that you had been expelled for. Don't you remember ?"

Sergei flushed and turned from the ragged creature with an expression of disgust.

"This is dishonesty, my dear sir !" he cried angrily. "This is swindling- I shall send the police for you. Damn you !".

Sir ! He said, laying his hand on his heart, "the fact is I was lying ! I am neither a student nor a school teacher. All that was fiction. Formerly I sang in a Russian choir and was sent away for drunkenness. But what else can I do ? I can't get along without lying. No one will give me anything when I tell the truth, what can I do ?"

"What can you do ? You ask what you can do ?" cried Sergei, coming close to him. "Work ! That's what you can do ! You must work !"

"What-yes. I know that myself; but where can I find work ?"

"How would you like to chop wood for me ?"

"I wouldn't refuse to do that, but in these days even skilled wood-cutters find themselves sitting without bread."

"Will you come and chop wood for me?"

"Yes sir, I will".

"Very well; we'll soon find out."

Comprehension check :

- 1) Who are the characters described in this part of the story? What are they doing?
- 2) Which country are they from ? How do you know this ?
- 3) What does the beggar look like ?
- 4) Did Sergei get angry with the beggar ? Why ?
- 5) Do you think the beggar was lying ? What made him tell lies ?
- 6) Did Sergei help the beggar to find work ? What kind of work did he suggest for the beggar ?
- 7) The advocate asked the beggar to do hard work like chopping wood. Was it a punishment or help ?
- 8) Do you think the beggar would give up begging and work for Sergei ?

What will happen next ? Will the beggar work for Sergei ? Read the next part to know the answer.



Sergei hastened along, rubbing his hands. He called his cook out of the kitchen.

“Here, Olga,” he said, “take this gentleman into the wood shed and let him chop wood.”

The scarecrow of a beggar shrugged his shoulders, as if in perplexity, and went irresolutely after the cook. It was obvious from his gait that he had not consented to go and chop wood because he was hungry and wanted work, but simply from pride and shame and because he had been trapped by his own words. It was obvious too that his strength had been undermined by vodka and that he was unhealthy and did not feel the slightest inclination for toil.

Sergei hurried into the dining room. From its windows one could see the woodshed and everything that went on in the yard. Standing at the window, Sergei saw the

cook and the beggar come out into the yard by the back door and make their way across the dirty snow to the shed. Olga glared wrathfully at her companion, shoved him aside with her elbow, unlocked the shed, and angrily banged the door.

Next he saw the pseudo-teacher scat 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, juggling from the expression of her lips, began to scold him. The beggar irresolutely pulled a billet of wood towards him, set it up between his feet, and tapped it feebly with the axe. The billet wavered and fell down. The beggar again pulled it to him, blew on his freezing hands, and tapped it with his axe cautiously, as if afraid of hitting his overshoe or of cutting his finger; the stick of wood again fell to the ground.

Sergei's anger had vanished and he now began to feel a little sorry and ashamed of himself for having set a spoiled, drunken, perhaps sick man to work at menial labour in the cold.

An hour later Olga came in and announced that the wood had all been chopped.

"Good ! Give him half a rouble," said Sergei. "If he wants to he can come back and cut wood on the first day of each month. We can always find work for him."

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. Now he would shovel snow, now put the wood-shed in order; now beat the dust out of rugs and mattresses. Every time he received from twenty to forty copecks, and once, even a pair of old trousers was sent out to him.

When Sergei moved into another house he hired him to help in the packing and hauling of the furniture. This time the waif was sober, gloomy, and silent. He hardly touched the furniture, and walked behind the wagons hanging his head, not even making pretence of appearing busy. He only shivered in the cold and became embarrassed and his tattered, fancy overcoat, after the moving was over Sergei sent for him.

"Well, I am happy that my words have taken effect, 'he said handing him a rouble. "Here's for your pains. I see you are sober and have no objection to work. What is your name ?"

"Lushkoff".

"Well, Lushoff, I can now offer you some other, cleaner employment. Can you write ?"

"I can."

"Then take this letter to a friend of mine tomorrow and you will be given some copying to do. Work hard, don't drink, and remember what I have said to you. Goodbye!"

Pleased at having put a man on there right path, Sergei tapped lushkoff kindly on the shoulder and even gave him his hand at parting. Lushkoff took the letter, and from that day forth came no more to the yard for work.

Comprehension check :

- 1) What is this part of the story about ? Did Lushkoff agree to chop wood for Sergei?
- 2) What did Sergei see from the window of the dining room ?
- 3) What other work did Lushkoff have to do besides chopping wood ?
- 4) What kind of person was Sergei, Kind/ cruel ? How do you know this ?
- 5) Sergei said "Well, I am happy that my words have taken effect. Why dis Sergei say so ? Is he right in saying this ?
- 6) Did Lushkoff know reading and writing ? What did Sergei want Lushkoff to do for earning money ?
- 7) Do you expect that Lushkoff will get a better job and he won't come to sergei for chopping wood ?

(Read the last part to know about Sergei's future life.)



Two years went by. Then one evening, as Sergei was standing at the ticket window of a theatre paying for his seat, he noticed a little man beside him with a coat collar of curly fur and a worn sealskin cap. This little individual timidly asked the ticket seller for a seat in the gallery and paid for it in copper coins.

“Lushkoff, is that you ?” cried Sergei, recognizing in the little man his former wood-chopper. “How are you ? What are you doing ? How is everything with you ?”

“All right. I am a notary now and am paid thirty-five roubles a month”.

“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 ? I nearly had you sinking into the ground at my feet that day. Thank you, old man, for not forgetting my words”.

“Thank you, too”. said Lushkoff. “If I hadn’t come to you then I might still have been calling myself a teacher or a student to this day. Yes, by flying to your protraction I dragged myself out of a pit.”

“I am very glad, indeed.”

“Thank you for your kind words and deeds. I am very grateful to you and to your cook. God bless that good and noble woman ! You spoke finely then, and I shall be indebted to you to my dying day, but, strictly speaking, it was your cook, Olga, who saved me.”

“How is that ?”

“When I used to come to your house to chop wood, she used to begin; ‘Oh, you sot, you ! Oh you miserable creature ! There’s nothing for you but ruin.’ And then she would sit down opposite me and grow sad, look into my face and weep. ‘Oh, you unlucky man ! There is no pleasure for you in this world and there will be none in the world to come. You drunkard ! You will burn in hell. Oh, you unlucky man ! Oh, you unhappy one ! And so she would carry on, you know, in that strain. I can’t tell you how much misery she

suffered. How many tears she shed for my sake ! But the chief thing was- she used to chop the wood for me. Do you know, sir, that I did not chop one single stick of wood for you ? She did it all. Why this saved me, why I changed, why I stopped drinking at the sight of her I cannot explain. I only know that, owing to her words and noble deeds, a change took place in my heart; she set me right and I shall never forget it. However , it is time to go now; there goes the bell". Lushkoff bowed and departed to the gallery.

Anton Chekhov

Comprehension check :

- 1) When and where did Sergei meet Lushkoff ? How was Lushkoff dressed ?
- 2) What work did Lushkoff do then ? How much salary did he get every month ?
- 3) Did Sergei become happy to see the beggar in a different form? How do you know this ?
- 4) Was Lushkoff very grateful to Sergei ? Which statement(s) say so ?
- 5) Who really saved and changed the beggar's life and how ?
- 6) What made the beggar stop drinking ?
- 7) Which character in the story do you like most ? Support your answer with suitable reasons.

C. Glossary :

copeck : Russian coin equal

swear : promise

intrigue	:	a secret plot / plan
ragged	:	wearing old torn clothes
fawn	:	light brown
suppliant	:	a person making humble request
mendicant	:	beggar
expel	:	to force a pupil to leave a school
swindling	:	cheating a person of money
flush	:	become red
disgust	:	strong disapproval
fiction	:	imaginary story
choir	:	singing group or melody party
billet	:	a thin piece of wood
vodka	:	a colourless strong alcoholic drink
waif	:	a homeless person
shovel	:	remove snow with a shovel (a tool like a spade with a broad blade and typically unturned sides)
roasting	:	an informal or humorous word : here scolding
sod	:	a habitual drunkard

D. Writing :

Answer the following questions in fifty words.

- 1) Who were Sergei and Lushkoff ? Describe their first meeting.
- 2) Did Lushkoff become a beggar by circumstances or by choice ? What reasons did the beggar give to Sergei for telling lies ?

- 3) Why did Lushkoff agree to chop wood ? What were the other things Lushkoff had to do ?
- 4) Collect information about Sergei's cook and write a short paragraph.
- 5) What made the beggar change his way of life ?
- 6) Which character do you like most and why ?
- 7) Write a short paragraph suggesting some ways for abolishing the practice of begging in our country.

E. Activity

Activity -1

Read the following statements and write the names of the persons who said the statements in the blank spaces provided.

- a) She set me right and I shall never forget it . _____
- b) For three days I have had nothing to eat . _____
- c) I only know that, owing to her words and noble deeds, a change took place in my heart. _____
- d) I shall send the police for you . _____
- e) Well, I am happy that my words have taken effect. _____
- f) Help me kindly : I am ashamed to ask - but I am obliged to by circumstance. _____
- g) Work ! That's what you can do ! You must work ! _____
- h) No one will give me anything when I tell the truth . _____
- i) Work hard, don't drink, and remember what I have said to you. _____
- j) Thank you for your kind words and deeds. _____
- k) I am delighted for your shake. _____
- l) How are you ? What are you doing ? How is everything with you ? _____

Activity-II

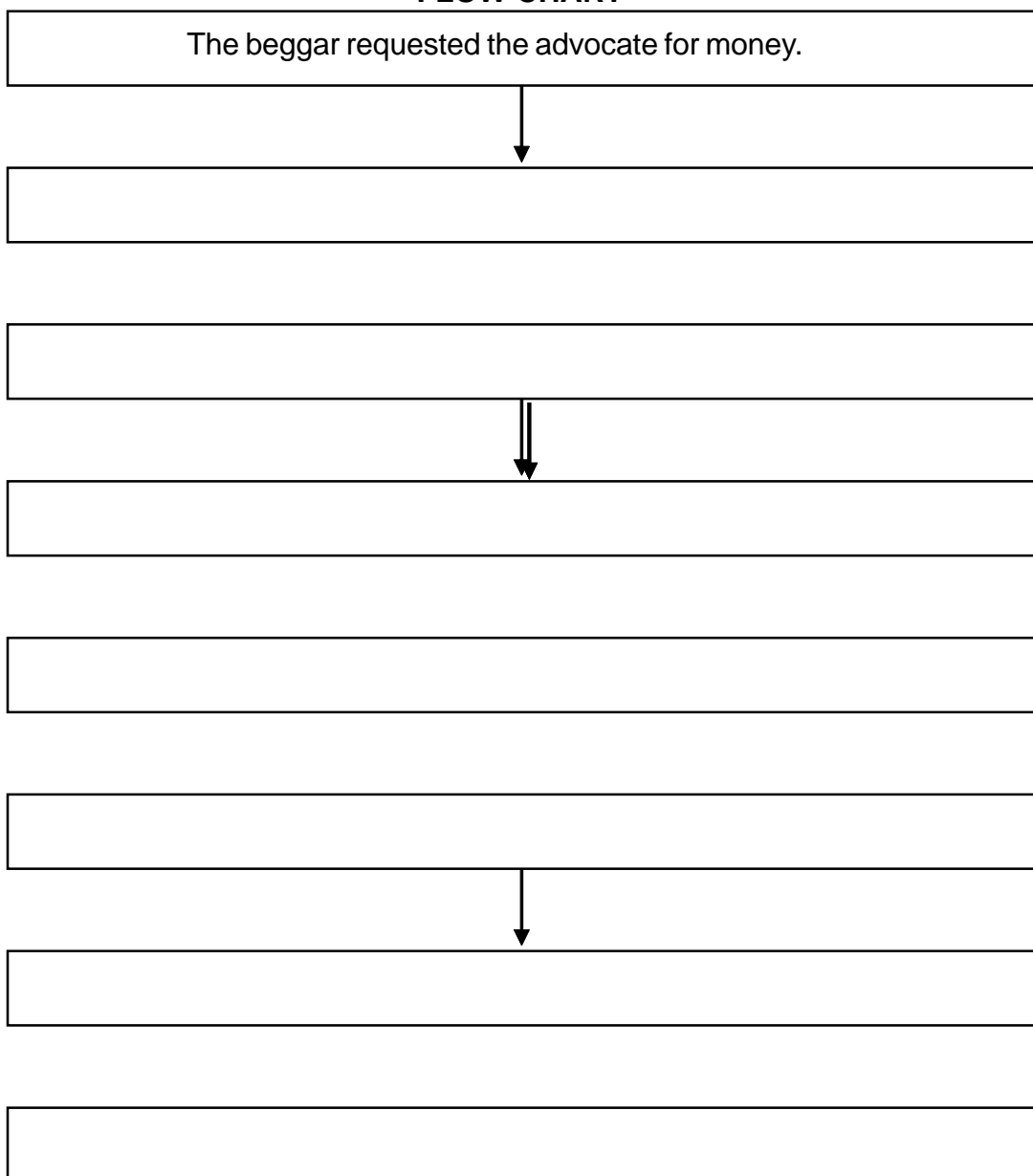
Arrange the above statements in proper order as they are used in the story.

Activity - III

Supply appropriate information from the bracket for the blank spaces in the flow chart. One is done for you.

(asked the beggar to chop wood, the beggar requested the advocate for money, the advocate offered another one of copying, advocate met Lushkoff after two years, the beggar owed a lot to the cook and departed, the advocate wanted to know the truth, the beggar told him every thing about his change, on the first of every month appeared and earned half a rouble)

FLOW CHART



Activity - IV

Read the story and fill in the blanks in the table with information about the characters.

Name of the Characters	Physical appearance	Profession	Dress	Quality	Work

