

Read the following passage carefully and answer the questions that follow:

The fact was that the host, a privy councillor called Stepan Nikiforovitch Nikiforov, an old bachelor of sixty-five, was celebrating his removal into a house he had just bought, and as it happened, also his birthday, which he had never kept before. The festivity, however, was not on a very grand scale; as we have seen already, there were only two guests, both of them former colleagues and former subordinates of Mr. Nikiforov; that is, an actual civil councillor called Semyon Ivanovitch Shipulenko, and another actual civil councillor, Ivan Ilyitch Pralinsky. They had arrived to tea at nine o'clock, then had begun upon the wine, and knew that at exactly half-past eleven they would have to set off home. Their host had all his life been fond of regularity. A few words about him.

He had begun his career as a petty clerk with nothing to back him, had quietly plodded on for forty-five years, knew very well what to work towards, had no ambition to draw the stars down from heaven, though he had two stars already, and particularly disliked expressing his own opinion on any subject. He was honest, too, that is, it had not happened to him to do anything particularly dishonest; he was a bachelor because he was an egoist; he had plenty of brains, but he could not bear showing his intelligence; he particularly disliked slovenliness and enthusiasm, regarding it as moral slovenliness; and towards the end of his life had become completely absorbed in a voluptuous, indolent comfort and systematic solitude.

Though he sometimes visited people of a rather higher rank than his own, yet from his youth up he could never endure entertaining visitors himself; and of late he had, if he did not play a game of patience, been satisfied with the society of his dining-room clock, and would spend the whole evening dozing in his arm-chair, listening placidly to its ticking under its glass case on the chimney-piece. In appearance he was closely shaven and extremely proper-looking, he was well-preserved, looking younger than his age; he promised to go on living many years longer, and closely followed the rules of the highest good breeding.

His post was a fairly comfortable one: he had to preside somewhere and to sign something. In short, he was regarded as a first-rate man. He had only one passion, or more accurately, one keen desire: that was, to have his own house, and a house built like a gentleman's residence, not a commercial investment. His desire was at last realised: he looked out and bought a house on the Petersburg Side, a good way off, it is true, but it had a garden and was an elegant house. The new owner decided that it was better for being a good way off: he did not like entertaining at home, and for driving to see any one or to the office he had a handsome carriage of a chocolate hue, a coachman, Mihey, and two little but strong and handsome horses. All this was honourably acquired by the careful frugality of forty years, so that his heart rejoiced over it.

AN UNPLEASANT PREDICAMENT

<https://www.holybooks.com/wp-content/uploads/An-Unpleasant-Predicament.pdf>

Questions

(i) For each word given below, choose the correct meaning (as used in the passage): [2]

1. Slovenliness

- (a) Enthusiasm
- (b) Laziness and untidiness
- (c) Cleverness
- (d) Excitement

2. Voluptuous

- (a) Strict and harsh
- (b) Luxurious and sensual

- (c) Poor and frugal
 - (d) Disciplined
-

(ii) Which word in the passage is closest in meaning to the opposite of "ambitious"? [1]

- (a) Systematic
 - (b) Placidity
 - (c) Indolent
 - (d) Proper-looking
-

(iii) Short Answer Questions: (about 30–40 words each) [8]

3. Why was Mr. Nikiforov hosting a celebration, and how many guests were invited?
 4. What were some characteristics that defined Mr. Nikiforov's personality and career?
 5. How did Mr. Nikiforov usually spend his evenings after retirement?
 6. What specific desire did Mr. Nikiforov have regarding the kind of house he wanted, and how did he fulfill it?
-

(iv) In not more than 50 words, narrate the sequence of Mr. Nikiforov's life achievements leading up to the purchase of his house. [8]

Answer Key

(i) Vocabulary Questions: [2]

1. **Slovenliness** — (b) Laziness and untidiness

(He disliked slovenliness and enthusiasm, seeing it as moral disorder.)

2. **Voluptuous** — (b) Luxurious and sensual

(He became absorbed in a life of voluptuous, indolent comfort.)

(ii) Antonym-Based Question: [1]

3. **Word closest to the opposite of "ambitious"** — (c) Indolent

(Indolent means lazy and without ambition.)

(iii) Short Answer Questions: [8]

4. **Why was Mr. Nikiforov hosting a celebration, and how many guests were invited?**

Mr. Nikiforov was celebrating both his birthday and his recent purchase of a new house. The celebration was modest, with only two former colleagues invited as guests.

5. **What were some characteristics that defined Mr. Nikiforov's personality and career?**

Mr. Nikiforov was honest, regular, egoistic, and avoided expressing opinions. He disliked enthusiasm, valued systematic solitude, and preferred to work steadily without displaying his intelligence openly.

6. **How did Mr. Nikiforov usually spend his evenings after retirement?**

After retirement, he spent his evenings quietly at home, dozing in his armchair, listening to the ticking of his dining-room clock, or playing patience, avoiding social interaction.

7. **What specific desire did Mr. Nikiforov have regarding the kind of house he wanted, and how did he fulfill it?**

Mr. Nikiforov desired a house that resembled a gentleman's residence rather than a commercial investment. After years of frugal living, he bought an elegant house with a garden on the Petersburg Side.

(iv) 50-Word Narrative Summary: [8]

Mr. Nikiforov began his career as a petty clerk and steadily rose through honest work over forty-five years. Preferring solitude and comfort, he carefully saved his earnings. His greatest ambition was to own a gentleman's house, which he finally achieved, marking a personal triumph celebrated with a quiet gathering.