



**INDIAN SCHOOL AL WADI AL KABIR**

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH- (2025-26)**

## **QUESTION BANK**

**BEST SELLER- by O. Henry**

**Best Seller by O. Henry**

### **Summary**

In *Best Seller* by O. Henry, the narrator encounters John A. Pescud, a travelling salesman, during a train journey. Pescud dismisses popular romantic novels as unrealistic, arguing that people in real life marry within their own social class. Yet, in a twist of irony, he himself falls in love with Jessie Allyn, the daughter of an aristocratic Virginian family. Despite the difference in their social class, he pursues her with determination, eventually winning the approval of her father, Colonel Allyn, and marrying her. The story concludes with humor and irony, exposing the contradiction between Pescud's criticism of fiction and the reality of his own romantic adventure.

### **Key Themes**

- Irony – Pescud mocks romantic best-sellers but lives out a similar story.
- Romance vs Reality – Real-life romance doesn't always fit logical "rules."
- Social Class & Marriage – Contrast between Pescud's views and his marriage.
- Character of Pescud – Ambitious, persistent, confident salesman but also somewhat hypocritical.

### **Short Answer Questions**

#### **Q1. What was John A. Pescud's opinion about best sellers?**

Pescud believed best sellers were unrealistic and exaggerated, as they often portrayed common men marrying princesses or women of high rank. He felt that in real life people usually marry within their own social station.

#### **Q2. How did Pescud first meet Jessie?**

Pescud first saw Jessie on a train journey to Cincinnati. Captivated by her simplicity and charm, he followed her across several towns, eventually discovering her aristocratic background in Virginia.

#### **Q3. Describe John A. Pescud's personality.**

Pescud was ambitious, confident, and persistent. Though he criticized romance in novels, he

himself pursued a girl from a higher class. He was also honest about his life and respectful towards Jessie's father.

**Q4. How did John win over Colonel Allyn?**

Initially stern, Colonel Allyn warmed up to Pescud's honesty and humor. Pescud explained his salary, future prospects, and principles. His frankness and respect impressed the Colonel, who eventually permitted his courtship of Jessie.

**Q5. Why did John get off at Coketown?**

John got off at Coketown to find petunias for Jessie. She had fondly remembered similar flowers from her Virginia home, and he wanted to please her, showing his love and devotion.

**Extract-Based Questions**

*"Say," said Pescud, stirring his discarded book with the hand, "did you ever read one of these best-sellers? I mean the kind where the hero is an American swell... They're all alike."*

**Q1. Which book had Pescud thrown away?**

Ans: *The Rose Lady and Trevelyan.*

**Q2. Why did Pescud dislike such books?**

Ans: He found them unrealistic because they paired ordinary men with princesses and nobles, which he thought never happened in real life.

**Q3. What does this remark reveal about Pescud's character?**

Ans: It shows his practical mindset and tendency to criticize exaggerated romantic notions, although his own life later contradicts his views.

*"At first, I thought he was going to throw me out of the window, but I kept on talking. Well, that got him laughing, and I'll bet that was the first laugh those ancestors and horsehair sofa had heard in many a day."*

**Q1. Who is "he" in this extract?**

Ans: Colonel Allyn, Jessie's father.

**Q2. Why did Pescud expect to be thrown out?**

Ans: Because he had confessed to following Jessie secretly and wanted to court her, despite being a travelling salesman of lower status.

**Q3. What effect did Pescud's honesty have on Colonel Allyn?**

Ans: It impressed and amused the Colonel, leading him to accept Pescud and treat him with warmth.

*"I married her a year ago," said John. "I told you I built a house in the East End. The belted—I mean the Colonel—is there, too."*

**Q1. Who is “her” in this extract?**

Ans: Jessie Allyn, daughter of Colonel Allyn.

**Q2. What does John mean by “the belted—I mean the Colonel”?**

Ans: He is humorously referring to Jessie’s father, Colonel Allyn, alluding to the aristocratic “banded earls.”

**Q3. What does this statement tell us about Pescud’s success?**

Ans: It shows that Pescud achieved personal and social success, marrying Jessie and settling into a prosperous life, while maintaining ties with her father.

*“I was on the south-bound, going to Cincinnati, about eighteen months ago, when I saw, across the aisle, the finest looking girl I’d ever laid eyes on. Nothing spectacular, you know, but just the sort you want for keeps.”*

**Q1. Who is the girl being described?**

Ans: Jessie Allyn, the daughter of Colonel Allyn of Virginia.

**Q2. What impression did Jessie make on Pescud?**

Ans: Jessie appeared simple, graceful, and charming, the kind of woman he wanted as a lifelong partner.

**Q3. What does this incident mark in the story?**

Ans: This moment marks the beginning of Pescud’s love story and the turning point of his life.

*“Of course, my father wouldn’t allow a drummer to set his foot in Elmcroft. If he knew that I was talking to one over the fence, he would lock me in my room.”*

**Q1. Why did Jessie warn Pescud?**

Ans: She knew her father was proud and would not accept a travelling salesman as a suitor for his daughter.

**Q2. What is “Elmcroft”?**

Ans: Elmcroft is the Allyn family mansion in Virginia.

**Q3. What does this dialogue reveal about Jessie’s character?**

Ans: Jessie is honest and straightforward but also playful, hinting at her interest in Pescud while respecting her father’s authority.

*“There wasn’t enough furniture in it to fill an eight-dollar flat. Some old horsehair lounges and three-legged chairs and some framed ancestors on the walls were all that met the eye. But when Colonel Allyn came in, the place seemed to light up.”*

**Q1. Describe the contrast shown in this extract.**

Ans: The house appeared shabby and poorly furnished, but Colonel Allyn’s presence added dignity, charm, and grandeur to it.

**Q2. What does this tell us about Colonel Allyn?**

Ans: It shows his aristocratic bearing and strong personality, which outshone the material decline of his household.

**Q3. Why is this moment important?**

Ans: This was Pescud's first meeting with Jessie's father, a decisive event in winning Jessie's hand.

*"Yes," says I, "I remember. My foot slipped as I was jumping on the step, and I nearly tumbled off."*

*"I know," says she. "And—and I—I was afraid you had, John A. I was afraid you had."*

**Q1. What does Jessie confess in this moment?**

Ans: Jessie reveals that she cared for John and feared he might have been hurt, showing her affection for him.

**Q2. What does this conversation signify in their relationship?**

Ans: It shows the growth of trust and emotional closeness between Jessie and John.

**Q3. How does this exchange contrast with Pescud's earlier claims about love?**

Ans: Earlier, Pescud criticized love stories, but here he experiences genuine romance, proving real life can mirror fiction.

*"I glanced downward and saw the best-seller. I picked it up and set it carefully farther along on the floor of the car, where the raindrops would not fall upon it. And then, suddenly, I smiled, and seemed to see that life has no geographical bounds."*

**Q1. What does the narrator mean by "life has no geographical bounds"?**

Ans: It means that love and human experiences go beyond borders, rules, and social boundaries.

**Q2. Why does the narrator protect the best-seller from rain despite Pescud's criticism of it?**

Ans: It symbolizes respect for the irony that Pescud's life ended up resembling the very romances he ridiculed.

**Q3. What is O. Henry's message through this ending?**

Ans: Life is full of irony and surprises, often blurring the line between fiction and reality.

**Value-Based / Value-Added Questions**

**Q1. Pescud claimed people marry within their social class, yet he married Jessie Allyn, who came from an aristocratic family. Discuss the irony in his life with reference to the story.**

Ans: The greatest irony in *Best Seller* lies in Pescud's criticism of romantic novels. He mocked them for portraying ordinary men marrying women of higher social rank, calling such stories unrealistic. However, in his own life, he did exactly the same. He pursued Jessie Allyn, daughter of an aristocratic Virginian family, and married her despite belonging to a modest background. His actions contradict his earlier claims, proving that real life can be stranger than fiction. This

irony not only highlights Pescud's hypocrisy but also reflects O. Henry's style of surprise endings and humor. It reminds readers that love often transcends boundaries and cannot be confined to rigid rules of class or status.

**Q2. The elderly play a vital role in families. How does Colonel Allyn's character highlight the importance of respecting and valuing the elderly?**

**Ans:** Colonel Allyn, though aged and initially stern, becomes a significant figure in Pescud's life. His approval was essential for John to marry Jessie. Despite belonging to a noble family, he listens patiently to John's candid story and even laughs at his anecdotes. This shows the wisdom, experience, and tolerance of elders, who often act as guiding forces. The story highlights that the elderly not only preserve traditions but also provide warmth, understanding, and companionship. In today's fast-paced life, young people often overlook their value, but Colonel Allyn reminds us that respecting the elderly strengthens family bonds. Their acceptance and guidance can transform situations, proving that they are integral to both family harmony and personal growth.

**Long answer Questions**

**Q1. Pescud was critical of romantic best-sellers, yet he lived out a story similar to them. Discuss the irony in the story.**

**Ans:** John A. Pescud strongly criticized best-selling novels for portraying unrealistic romances, where ordinary men married princesses or women of high social standing. He argued that in reality, people married within their own class and social circle. However, his own life contradicted this belief. He fell in love with Jessie Allyn, daughter of a wealthy Virginian aristocrat, and pursued her persistently until he gained her father's approval. Eventually, he married her, proving that his actions mirrored the very stories he ridiculed. The irony lies in Pescud's hypocrisy: he mocked fictional romances yet became the hero of one himself. Through this, O. Henry highlights the unpredictability of life and the humorous contradictions in human behavior.

**Q2. Describe the character of John A. Pescud with reference to his appearance, beliefs, and actions.**

**Ans:** John A. Pescud is presented as a small man with a wide smile and sharp eyes, working as a travelling salesman. He believed in living decently and was proud of his honest profession. Though he dismissed romantic novels as unrealistic, he himself pursued a romantic adventure by following Jessie Allyn across towns and winning her hand. His actions show determination, persistence, and courage. He impressed Jessie's father with his frankness, humor, and ambition, which revealed his ability to adapt and charm others. At the same time, his hypocrisy cannot be ignored, as his own life contradicted his opinions about love and social boundaries. Thus, Pescud emerges as a practical yet ironically romantic character.

**Q3. How did Pescud's meeting with Colonel Allyn shape the course of his love story?**

**Ans:** Pescud's meeting with Colonel Allyn was a decisive moment in his romance. Initially, the Colonel appeared stern and aristocratic, living in a grand mansion with a proud family legacy. Pescud, nervous yet determined, confessed openly that he had followed Jessie and wished to marry her. He also revealed his profession, income, and principles of honesty. Colonel Allyn's reaction was unexpectedly warm; instead of rejecting Pescud, he laughed at his anecdotes and engaged him in long conversations. This mutual respect paved the way for Jessie's acceptance of Pescud. Without this meeting, Pescud's pursuit would have remained unfulfilled. Thus, Colonel Allyn's tolerance, wisdom, and eventual approval shaped the success of Pescud's love story.

**Q4. How did Pescud's persistence lead to his success in love and profession?**

**Ans:** Persistence is a defining quality of John A. Pescud. Professionally, it made him a successful salesman; he earned promotions, a higher salary, and even shares in his company. Personally, persistence led him to pursue Jessie Allyn with determination. Despite social differences and the risk of rejection, he followed her across towns, confessed his love honestly, and won over her father through sincerity. His efforts ultimately resulted in marriage and a settled life. Though his persistence bordered on obsession, it reflected his belief in not giving up on goals. O. Henry thus portrays persistence as both a humorous and admirable trait, showing how dedication can overcome barriers of class, distance, and circumstance.

**Q5. Comment on the significance of the title *Best Seller*.**

**Ans:** The title *Best Seller* is highly significant because it carries irony, which is the hallmark of O. Henry's style. At the beginning, John A. Pescud ridicules best-selling romantic novels, calling them unrealistic since they often describe ordinary men marrying women of royal or aristocratic backgrounds. However, his own life unfolds exactly like such a story—he, a travelling salesman, falls in love with Jessie Allyn, the daughter of a proud Virginian aristocrat, and eventually marries her. Thus, Pescud ends up living the plot of the very books he scorned. The title draws attention to this humorous contradiction and highlights how life can sometimes be "stranger than fiction." In short, the title emphasizes both the irony and the unexpected twists that make the story memorable.