

**The night dragged on with an endless, bitterly cold routine of pumping, steering and working the radio. We were getting no replies to our Mayday calls — which was not surprising in this remote corner of the world.**

**Sue's head had swollen alarmingly; she had two enormous black eyes, and now she showed us a deep cut on her arm. When I asked why she hadn't made more of her injuries before this, she replied, "I didn't want to worry you when you were trying to save us all."**

Mayday calls – words used to signal ships stuck in a disastrous situation through radio

The whole night was about the endless routine of pumping out the water, steering the wheel and working the radio. There were no replies to their signals sent over the radio as they were in the remotest part of the world. Sue's head was now more swollen and she had two black eyes with a deep cut in her arm. When upon being asked why she didn't tell him about her injuries earlier, she said that she didn't want to worry him as he was trying to save all of them.

**By morning on January 3, the pumps had the water level sufficiently under control for us to take two hours' rest in rotation. But we still had a tremendous leak somewhere below the waterline and, on checking, I found that nearly all the boat's main rib frames were smashed down to the keel. In fact, there was nothing holding up a whole section of the starboard hull except a few cupboard partitions.**

**We had survived for 15 hours since the wave hit, but Wavewalker wouldn't hold together long enough for us to reach Australia. I checked our charts and calculated that there were two small islands a few hundred kilometres to the east. One of them, Ile Amsterdam, was a French scientific base. Our only hope was to reach these pinpricks in the vast ocean. But unless the wind and seas abated so we could hoist sail, our chances would be slim indeed. The great wave had put our auxiliary engine out of action.**

Smashed – badly broken

Keel – steel structure along the base of the ship

Pinpricks – a prick caused by a pin

Pinpricks in the vast ocean – the two small islands in the vast ocean were very tiny like the prick caused by a pin

Abated – something unpleasant to become less intense

Auxiliary engine – small secondary engine used to board ships to operate a windlass in the ship

The water level was under control by the morning of January 3, so all of them took two hours rest in rotation. But there still was a leak somewhere below the waterline. Upon checking, the boat rib structure was badly broken down till the base of the ship. The whole section of starboard was held together with a few cupboard partitions.

The ship's condition was so bad that it would not make it till Australia. The narrator checked the charts and calculated that there were two small islands a few kilometres to the east, one

of them was Ile Amsterdam, which was a French Scientific base. Their only hope was to search and reach that island. But only if the wind and the sea do not cause further damage, else their chances were slim. The wave had destroyed the ship's auxiliary engine.

**On January 4, after 36 hours of continuous pumping, we reached the last few centimetres of water. Now, we had only to keep pace with the water still coming in. We could not set any sail on the main mast. Pressure on the rigging would simply pull the damaged section of the hull apart, so we hoisted the storm jib and headed for where I thought the two islands were. Mary found some corned beef and cracker biscuits, and we ate our first meal in almost two days.**

**But our respite was short-lived. At 4 p.m. black clouds began building up behind us; within the hour the wind was back to 40 knots and the seas were getting higher. The weather continued to deteriorate throughout the night, and by dawn on January 5, our situation was again desperate.**

Rigging – the ropes and wires supporting the structure of the ship

Hull – the framework of the vessel

Respite – a short period of rest

Deteriorate – get worse

After 36 hours of continuous pumping, on January 4, the water was only a few centimetres left to be pumped out. But they still had to pump out the water which was coming in. They could not set sail on the main mast. They hoisted the storm jib and sailed towards the two small islands. They had their first meal in two days, some corned beef and cracker biscuits found by Mary.

The rest period was short-lived as black clouds built up around 4 pm. The wind was now 40 knots and the sea was getting higher. The weather got worse and by the early morning of January 5, the situation was bad.

**When I went in to comfort the children, Jon asked, “Daddy, are we going to die?” I tried to assure him that we could make it. “But, Daddy,” he went on, “we aren’t afraid of dying if we can all be together — you and Mummy, Sue and I.”**

**I could find no words with which to respond, but I left the children’s cabin determined to fight the sea with everything I had. To protect the weakened starboard side, I decided to heave to — with the undamaged port hull facing the oncoming waves, using an improvised sea anchor of heavy nylon rope and two 22 litre plastic barrels of paraffin.**

**That evening, Mary and I sat together holding hands, as the motion of the ship brought more and more water in through the broken planks. We both felt the end was very near.**

Heave to – to raise or lift with effort

Paraffin – colorless flammable oil liquid

When the narrator went to comfort his children, his son asked him whether they were going to die. He tried to assure him that they would make it. His son replied that they were not afraid to die till they all were together. This filled the narrator with a determination to fight back. He made efforts to protect the weakened starboard side. He used an improvised sea anchor made of heavy nylon rope and two 22 liter plastic barrels of kerosene. That same evening, the narrator and his wife sat holding hands and they believed that their end was near.

**But Wavewalker rode out the storm and by the morning of January 6, with the wind easing, I tried to get a reading on the sextant. Back in the chartroom, I worked on wind speeds, changes of course, drift and current in an effort to calculate our position. The best I could determine was that we were somewhere in 150,000 kilometres of ocean looking for a 65 kilometre-wide island.**

**While I was thinking, Sue, moving painfully, joined me. The left side of her head was now very swollen and her blackened eyes narrowed to slits. She gave me a card she had made.**

**On the front she had drawn caricatures of Mary and me with the words: "Here are some funny people. Did they make you laugh? I laughed a lot as well." Inside was a message: "Oh, how I love you both. So this card is to say thank you and let's hope for the best." Somehow we had to make it.**

Sextant – an instrument with graduated arc of 60 degrees for taking altitudes and navigation  
Caricatures – picture of a person; cartoon

The ship made it through the storm and by the morning of January 6, the narrator tried to get reading on the sextant. He worked with wind speeds, drift and current and calculated their position. They were in 150,000 kilometres area of ocean, looking for a 65 kilometer wide island. While the narrator was still thinking, his daughter Sue, joined him and she was in pain. The left side of her head was swollen and her blackened eyes had narrowed down to slits. She gave him a card which she had made herself. On the front of the card was a cartoon image of her parents with words written about them being funny people and how they made her laugh. On the inside of the card, she told them how she loved them both and she thanked them. This made the narrator realize that they had to make it to the island.

**I checked and rechecked my calculations. We had lost our main compass and I was using a spare which had not been corrected for magnetic variation. I made an allowance for this and another estimate of the influence of the westerly currents which flow through this part of the Indian Ocean.**

**About 2 p.m., I went on deck and asked Larry to steer a course of 185 degrees. If we were lucky, I told him with a conviction I did not feel, he could expect to see the island at about 5 p.m.**

**Then with a heavy heart, I went below, climbed on my bunk and amazingly, dozed off. When I woke it was 6 p.m. and growing dark. I knew we must have missed the island, and with the sail, we had left, we couldn't hope to beat back into the westerly winds.**

**At that moment, a tousled head appeared by my bunk. “Can I have a hug?” Jonathan asked. Sue was right behind him.**

Tousled head – disarranged hair of the narrator’s son, Jonathan

Bunk – bed

Dozed off – went off to sleep

The narrator rechecked his calculations. They lost their main compass and were using the spare one which was not corrected for magnetic variations. He estimated the influence of the westerly currents which flow through the Indian Ocean. Around 2 pm, he went on deck and asked Larry to steer the wheel to 185 degrees. He felt, if they were lucky, they would see the island by 5 pm. Then he went below and slept. He woke up around 6 pm and it was dark outside. He thought that they might have missed the island. He started worrying about how they would tackle the westerly wind more as the ship wasn’t capable to sail more. His son came and asked him for a hug, his daughter followed.

**“Why am I getting a hug now?” I asked.**

**“Because you are the best daddy in the whole world — and the best captain,” my son replied.**

**“Not today, Jon, I’m afraid.”**

**“Why, you must be,” said Sue in a matter-of-fact voice. “You found the island.”**

**“What!” I shouted.**

**“It’s out there in front of us,” they chorused, “as big as a battleship.”**

**I rushed on deck and gazed with relief at the stark outline of Ile Amsterdam. It was only a bleak piece of volcanic rock, with little vegetation — the most beautiful island in the world!**

Bleak – an area of land lacking vegetation

Stark – sharply defined

He asked why he was getting a hug. His son replied that he was the best daddy in the world and also called him the best captain. The narrator replied that he was afraid. Sue told him then that they had found the island which was as big as a battleship.

The narrator rushed to the deck and gave a sigh of relief. They could see the complete outline of Ile Amsterdam. There was a bleak piece of volcanic rock in front of them. It had a little vegetation. It was the most beautiful island in the world.

**We anchored offshore for the night, and the next morning all 28 inhabitants of the island cheered as they helped us ashore.**

**With land under my feet again, my thoughts were full of Larry and Herbie, cheerful and optimistic under the direst stress, and of Mary, who stayed at the wheel for all those crucial hours. Most of all, I thought of a seven-year-old girl, who did not want us to worry about a head injury (which subsequently took six minor operations to remove a recurring blood clot between skin and skull), and of a six-year-old boy who was not afraid to die.**

Anchored – moor a ship to the sea bottom

Offshore – situated at the sea some distance from the shore

Ashore – on the shore of the land

Optimistic – hopeful and confident

They moored the ship at some distance from the shore and the next morning, 28 inhabitants of the Amsterdam island helped them to move on the shore of the land. As he felt the land again on his feet, he thought of his crewmen and his wife. He also thought of his seven-year-old daughter who was injured badly. She had to go through six minor operations to remove the blood clot in her head. His son who never gave up and was not afraid to die.

## **We are not Afraid to Die Question Answers**

### **Understanding the Text**

1. List the steps taken by the captain

(i) to protect the ship when rough weather began.

(ii) to check the flooding of the water in the ship.

Ans: (i) the narrator decided to slow down the ship to protect it from bad and stormy weather. He dropped the storm jib and lashed heavy mooring rope across the stern of the ship. Then, they double – lashed everything. They carried their life-raft drill, attached lifelines, donned life jackets and oilskins.

(ii) to check the flooding of the water, the narrator put a waterproof hatch which covered the gaping holes. This diverted the water flow to the side. His hand pumps were blocked due to debris and his one electric pump was short-circuited. He found a hand pump and a spare electric pump. He connected the electric pump to the out pipe and started it.

2. Describe the mental condition of the voyagers on 4 and 5 January.

Ans: On January 4, the voyagers felt relieved as they were continuously pumping out water for the past 36 hours and only a few centimetres of water was left. They had their first meal in two days. Mary found some corned beef and cracker biscuits.

Later, around 4 pm, the weather changed as black clouds marched towards them. The wind was now 40 knots and the sea was getting higher. The weather got worse and by the early morning of January 5, the situation was bad. This gave them mental stress.

3. Describe the shifts in the narration of the events as indicated in the three sections of the text. Give a subtitle to each section.

Ans:

The first section: Beginning of the Round – the – Voyage

The first section was cheerful and full of hope as the family began their planned voyage just like the one done 200 years ago by the famous Captain James Cook. They had perfected their seafaring skills for 16 years. They built a ship 'Wavewalker' professionally which was a 23 metres long, 30 tons wooden-hulled ship. They celebrated Christmas on the ship despite the bad weather.

The Second Section: the struggle with the big attack

This section changed from cheerful to intense. The family was under great pressure to survive the oncoming waves and bad weather conditions. A giant wave created chaos and the ship was about to overturn. The narrator was thrown off into the water and he almost drowned and got injured. Along with two hired crewmen, the narrator pumped out the water from the ship for a continuous 36 hours. He also tried repairing the parts of the ship. He almost lost his hope and believed they would die. But his children were fearless and courageous enough which gave him the determination to fight back.

The third section: Victory

With the support of his children, the narrator kept trying to save the ship in order to reach the two small islands, Ile Amsterdam. They finally reached the destination and got help from the inhabitants of the island. His son called him the best daddy and best captain.

Talking about the Text

1. What difference did you notice between the reaction of the adults and the children when faced with danger?

Ans: There was a huge difference between the reaction of the adults and the children. The adults lose their hope at the end and wait for their fate of death. On the other hand, the children were hopeful and gave the narrator moral support. With the support of his children, Jonathan and Suzanne, he decided to make it to the island at any cost. The children showed maturity. His son expressed courage as to how he wasn't afraid to die if they all were together. His daughter made him a card expressing her love and affection towards her parents and wrote a beautiful message. She was injured still, she didn't let it become a hurdle for her parents who were trying to save the ship.

2. How does the story suggest that optimism helps to endure "the direst stress"?

Ans: Optimism is the determination to overcome any challenges. Without optimism, it is impossible to face difficulties and solve problems. The family fought with the sea with great optimism and determination which ultimately saved them. Again and again, on being attacked by the sea, they didn't stop trying which helped them get to the shore of the Ile Amsterdam island.

When the son of the narrator told him, "we aren't afraid of dying if we can all be together — you and Mummy, Sue and I". This showed the maturity of the children and how they played an important role in motivating the narrator who had almost lost hope. Sue, his daughter who made him a card showed how she was proud of her parents and didn't make a big deal of her injuries which were in a bad condition. With the struggles and efforts, they finally made it to the destination.

3. What lessons do we learn from such hazardous experiences when we are face-to-face with death?

Ans: Life is never about being happy all the time. We are constantly tested and how we tackle every problem and rise through it is the ultimate lesson. Such hazardous situations teach us how we should react towards them. We must never lose hope and keep trying as it will lead to success. In certain situations, one must keep calm and think logically. No matter how bad the situation is, there is always a way to get out of it. The significance of being extra cautious and to make sure that the situation doesn't get worse is required at such moments.

4. Why do you think people undertake such adventurous expeditions in spite of the risks involved?

Ans: The willingness to accept challenges drives people to take such adventurous expeditions in spite of the risk involved. People like to try different elements of nature and some do it as a passion. Surely people already know of the risks involved in such activities, but still, they do not hesitate to try it out.