Idle Days in Patagonia

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Memoirs (non fiction)

The wind had blown a gale all night, and I had been hourly expecting that

the tumbling, storm-vexed old steamer, in which I had taken passage to the

Rio Negro, would turn over once for all and settle down beneath that

tremendous tumult of waters. For the groaning sound of its straining

timbers, and the engine throbbing like an overtasked human heart, had made

the ship seem a living thing to me; and it was tired of the struggle, and

under the tumult was peace. But at about three o'clock in the morning the

wind began to moderate, and, taking off coat and boots, I threw myself into

my bunk for a little sleep.

Ours, it must be said, was a very curious boat, reported ancient and much

damaged; long and narrow in shape, like a Viking's ship, with the

passengers' cabins ranged like a row of small wooden cottages on the deck:

it was as ugly to look at as it was said to be unsafe to voyage in. To make

matters worse our captain, a man over eighty years old, was lying in his

cabin sick unto death, for, as a fact, he died not many days after our

mishap; our one mate was asleep, leaving only the men to navigate the

steamer on that perilous coast, and in the darkest hour of a tempestuous

night.

I was just dropping into a doze when a succession of bumps, accompanied by

strange grating and grinding noises, and shuddering motions of the ship,

caused me to start up again and rush to the cabin door. The night was still

black and starless, with wind and rain, but for acres round us the sea was

whiter than milk. I did not step out; close to me, half-way between my

cabin door and the bulwarks, where our only boat was fastened, three of the

sailors were standing together talking in low tones. "We are lost," I heard

one say; and another answer, "Ay, lost for ever!" Just then the mate,

roused from sleep, came running to them. "Good God, what have you done with

the steamer!" he exclaimed sharply; then, dropping his voice, he added,

"Lower the boat -- quick!"

I crept out and stood, unseen by them in the obscurity, within five feet of

the group. Not a thought of the dastardly character of the act they were

about to engage in -- for it was their intention to save themselves and

leave us to our fate -- entered my mind at the time. My only thought was

that at the last moment, when they would be unable to prevent it except by

knocking me senseless, I would spring with them into the boat and save

myself, or else perish with them in that awful white surf. But one other

person, more experienced than myself, and whose courage took another

and better form, was also near and listening. He was the first engineer -- a

young Englishman from Newcastle-on-Tyne. Seeing the men making for the

boat, he slipped out of the engine-room, revolver in hand, and secretly

followed them; and when the mate gave that order, he stepped forward with

the weapon raised, and said in a quiet but determined voice that he would

shoot the first man who should attempt to obey it. The men slunk away and

disappeared in the gloom. In a few moments more the passengers began

streaming out on to the deck in a great state of alarm; last of all the old

captain, white and hollow-eyed from his death-bed, appeared like a ghost

among us. He had not been long standing there, with arms folded on his

chest, issuing no word of command, and paying no attention to the agitated

questions addressed to him by the passengers, when, by some lucky chance,

the steamer got off the rocks and plunged on for a space through the

seething, milky surf; then, very suddenly, passed out of it into black and

comparatively calm water. For ten or twelve minutes she sped rapidly and

smoothly on; then it was said that she had ceased to move, that we were

stuck fast in the sand of the shore, although no shore was visible in the

intense darkness, and to me it seemed that we were still moving swiftly on.

A,C, B, D

A, B, C, B

B, A, B, A

C, B, B, A

A, C, C

| 1 | What is suggested when the narrator says they “had been hourly expecting”?   1. **They were waiting for something to happen soon** 2. Something happens every hour 3. They were checking something once an hour 4. They were expected to do something in an hour’s time |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 2 | Which one of these phrases is a relative clause?   1. And I had been hourly expecting 2. The tumbling, storm-vexed old steamer 3. **In which I had taken passage** 4. That tremendous tumult of waters | Relative clauses add extra information usually to a noun. It can be removed without changing the meaning of the sentence. |
| 3 | What effect is created when the writer says the boat is ‘groaning’?   1. It is tired and wants to sleep 2. **It is in pain and struggling** 3. It is upset and complaining 4. It is right about to snap | ‘Straining’ helps to solidify this idea. But also from the context, we know it is working extremely hard. Ie ‘overtasked human heart’ |
| 4 | What made the boat seem like a living thing to the writer?   1. That it was working hard 2. That it had a heart 3. That it did not like working hard 4. **The sounds and feelings** | The groaning and the throbbing reminded the reader of a living creature and of it having a heart. |
| 5 | What does “it was as ugly to look at as it was said to be unsafe to voyage in” mean?   1. **It is equally unsafe and ugly** 2. It was ugly as it was unsafe 3. It was unsafe as it was ugly 4. The writer thinks unsafe boats are ugly |  |
| 6 | What mood is the writer trying to create in the second paragraph?   1. An unbearable and hellish nightmare experience 2. **A hopeless, unwinnable and desperate situation** 3. A tragic and melancholy situation 4. A mysterious, creepy and ominous atmosphere | From the information given, we learn that the ship is barely able to sail, the conditions on board are extremely bad. Living conditions are poor, the captain is dead, the boat is breaking apart and everybody is doing all they can. |
| 7 | What word best replaces ‘perilous’ line XX?   1. Awful 2. Inadequate 3. **Dangerous** 4. Exhausting |  |
| 8 | Which one of these things is not mentioned about the boat?   1. It is very old 2. **It was used by Vikings** 3. It is an unusual boat 4. It has places to sleep on it |  |
| 9 | What does ‘succession of bumps’ mean?   1. A lot of bumps 2. **Multiple bumps one after another** 3. The bumps succeeded 4. The bumps made a pattern |  |
| 10 | Which one of these words would not describe the noise that woke up the writer?   1. **Unpleasant** 2. Satisfying 3. Ominous 4. Mystifying |  |
| 11 | Which of these words would not be used to describe the mate?   1. Selfish 2. **Selfless** 3. Untrustworthy 4. Dishonourable |  |
| 12 | What is another word for ‘perish’ line \_\_\_\_?   1. **Die** 2. Pray 3. Panic 4. Escape |  |
| 13 | What does the writer mean when they say “whose courage took another  and better form”?   1. They are more courageous 2. They have a better plan 3. **Their courage lets him confront the men** 4. They are stronger and have a fitter form |  |
| 14 | Which description best summarises the Englishman with the gun?   1. They are bold, brave and heroic 2. **They are committed to doing the right thing** 3. They want others to look up to them 4. They do not think it is actually an emergency |  |
| 15 | Which phrase highlights a sense of panic on the ship?   1. Slunk away and disappeared in the gloom 2. **Streaming out onto the deck in a great state of alarm** 3. Appeared like a ghost among us 4. The steamer got off the rocks and plunged on |  |
| 16 | How was the ship able to get into calmer waters?   1. **An unlikely occurrence** 2. The captain steered the ship 3. Everybody’s weight made the boat fall off the rocks 4. A bigger wave knocked it from the rocks |  |
| 17 | What writing technique is ‘milky surf’   1. **Metaphor** 2. Simile 3. Personification 4. Exaggeration |  |
| 18 | What writing technique is used when the writer describes the sea as ‘seething’ line \_\_\_\_\_\_\_?   1. Metaphor 2. Simile 3. **Personification** 4. Exaggeration |  |
| 19 | Which one of these statements is false?   1. The other mates were also Englishmen 2. The Englishman is the captain’s son 3. **The first engineer was one of the men the writer heard whispering** 4. The captain was close to dying |  |