Vikram’s English Academy (ICSE)

**Question Bank: A Helpless Situation**

1. **What does the narrator receive once or twice a year? How is it?**

**Ans:** The narrator receives a letter once or twice a year. He says it has a certain pattern that never materially changes in form and substance. However, he hasn’t still got used to it. It astonishes him.

1. **Which poetic device is used to compare the letter that he receives? What does he wonder to himself?**

**Ans:** The narrator uses a figure of speech i.e. Simile to compare the letter to a locomotive. He says that the letter affects him as the locomotive always affects him. He wonders to himself that though he has seen the letter a thousand times and it always looks the same way, he finds it impossible to contrive it. He finds it beyond human genius. He feels it cannot exist and it doesn’t exist yet it is there.

1. **Why he is not worried to print it?**

**Ans:** He is not worried to print it as the writer of it is dead years ago. He is sure that even if he tries to conceal her name and address her shade will not mind it.

1. **Did he ever send the reply? Justify.**

**Ans:** No, he wished to print the reply that he wrote but he didn’t send. He says even if he would have sent, it would be in form of a copy as he still finds the original pigeon holed with her letter.

1. **According to him, why does one not send replies?**

**Ans:** According to him, one doesn’t reply fearing to hurt where people don’t have any desire to hurt. He says he has done that a number of times: to not reply as it would hurt people.

1. **When was the letter written? How old was the writer then, when she wrote it? Justify.**

**Ans:** The letter was written on 3rd June 1879. The writer was around 30 years old. The incident she mentions in the letter had happened sixteen years ago when she was 14 years old.

1. **Where had the incident taken place? Which year? Who were there?**

**Ans:** The lady takes him back to fourteen years ago in 1862-1863 in Humboldt mines. She tries to remind him that he, Clagett, Oliver and the old blacksmith Tillou had lived in a lean-to

1. **Describe the accommodation and their residents.**

**Ans:** The lean-to was half way up the gulch and there were six long cabins in the camp. These cabins were strung pretty well separated up the gulch from tis mouth at the desert to where the last claim was at the divide. The lean-to in which the narrator lived in was the one with a canvas roof that the cow fell down through one night. Uncle Simmons lived in the principal cabin which was half-way up the divide, along with Dixon, Parker and Smith. It had two rooms one for the kitchen and the other for bunks and was the only one that had.

1. **How was the night of the party described? What did the people there had then?**

**Ans:** The writer of the letter says that the narrator and his party were there on the great night when they had the dried-apple pie.

1. **Who speaks of the dried-apple pie? Why?**

**Ans:** Uncle Simmons speaks of the dried-apple pie because he was curious how that dried apple pie which was supposed to be such a great thing that it appeared at Humboldt. Humboldt was out of the world and difficult to get to, even the bill of fare there was quite a slim one.

1. **What more does the writer-lady speak of Uncle Simmons?**

**Ans:** The writer-lady says that Uncle Simmon often speaks of the dried-apple pie. She also mentions how her Uncle ran across him every now and then all during those weeks that he and his party were there working their claim which was like the rest.

1. **What does the writer-lady mention about her husband?**

**Ans:**  The writer-lady mentions that the narrator might not have met her husband who was a bachelor then but he was there after the narrator left and lived in that very lean-to. Her husband often wishes if there would have been a photographer with him in those days.

1. **Describe the accident that the lady’s husband encountered?**

**Ans:** The lady’s husband met with an accident in the Old Hal Clayton claim that was abandoned like the others. After putting in a blast her husband didn’t climb out quick enough, though he scrambled the best he could. It landed him clear down on the train and hit a Piute. For weeks he didn’t recover.

1. **What was the favour that she wanted to make?**

**Ans:** The favour that the lady wanted to make was to give her some advice about a book that she had written. She had not claimed anything for it only that it was mostly true and as interesting as most of the books of the times. She mentions further that she was unknown in the literary world and he would understand if one doesn’t have an influence. So she wants him to be recommended to a publisher. She wanted to place the book on royalty basis plan with any publisher that he would suggest.

1. **Had she revealed the idea of writing a book to her family members?**

**Ans:** No, she hadn’t revealed any idea to her family members about writing a book. She wished it to be a secret from her husband and her family as she wanted to surprise them.

1. **What does she want the narrator to do?**

**Ans:** The lady wants the narrator to write a letter to some publisher or if better she wanted him to go and see them for her and then let her hear about it.

1. **Describe how far ‘the twin letter’ moves and where?**

**Ans:** According to the narrator, the twin letter is an embarrassing one and flies in every direction across the continent in the mails daily, nightly, hourly, unceasingly and unrestingly. It goes to every well-known merchant, railway official, manufacturer, capitalist and Mayor, Congressman, Governor, editor, publisher, author, broker and banker. In short, such letters go to every person who is supposed to have an influence.

1. **What is the pattern in which the letter comes, according to the narrator? What is expected by the applicant? Are the expectations of the applicant met?**

**Ans:** The pattern in which the letter comes is ‘you do not know me, but you once knew a relative of mine’. The applicant expects that the recipient gives a desired answer. No, the expectations of the applicant are not met though the recipients would love to give the desired answer.

1. **Why are the recipients not able to return the sort of answer that is desired?**

**Ans:** The recipients are not able to return the sort of answer that was desired because those letters don’t come from people who actually require help. The struggler who should be helped does his own helping. It doesn’t strike that struggler to apply a stranger. It is because he has talent and knows it and goes into his fight eagerly, with energy and determination preferring to be alone.

1. **According to the narrator, from whom does such letters come? What are the questions that trouble the narrator?**

**Ans:** Such letters come from people who are incapable and ‘unhelpable’. Questions like how one can answer such letters and what to say which will not inflict anyone’s wound trouble the narrator. According to him, one finds ways to avoid hurting with the answers and tries to come out of the difficult place with a contend conscience.

1. **How was his answer to the letter written by the lady?**

**Ans:** The narrator says that his answer was such that he tried not inflicting anyone’s wound and at the same time wanted to be satisfied with the answer. However, he want sure if it served both the purposes as it was long ago and he had forgotten about it.

1. **Which are the different questions asked by Mr. H to the narrator regarding the book?**

**Ans:** The different questions asked are: if he (the narrator) liked her books, who has been her publisher, if it is the first book and what the character of her book was.

1. **What reply does the narrator gives when asked how he knows her?**

**Ans:** The narrator says that he doesn’t know how long he has known the lady. She just happened to write to him that she needs a publisher and so the publisher is mentioned.

1. W**hat does Mr H reply regarding ‘influence’?**

**Ans:** Mr H replies that there is nothing to do with the influence part in such matters. It was their business to examine books that come from anyone. They would never turn away a book unexamined just because it belonged to a stranger. It would be foolish and no publisher ever does that.

1. **What was the next and immediate question asked by Mr H after ‘influence’?**

**Ans:** Immediately after ‘the influence’, the next question was on what ground she had requested his influence since the narrator didn’t know her. He wanted to know if the narrator knew her literature and if he could comment on it.

1. **What did the narrator not know? What did he know about the lady? Was it amusing for the publisher?**

**Ans:** The narrator didn’t know about her literature however he knew about the lady’s uncle. Yes it was very amusing for the publisher that the narrator had no idea whether she wrote well or not which was more important than just knowing her uncle.

1. **How much did the narrator about her uncle? Which other ties did he know?**

**Ans:** He had hardly known about her uncle. He is not sure what he knows about him as it was sixteen years ago. The other ties that he knew were: the cabin in which her uncle lived in, in the mines, also he knew uncle’s partners. He had almost known her husband even before she got married. He did know the abandoned shaft where the blast went off and also about the accident that he met with, with fatal consequences.

1. **Does the publisher get irritated? Which sentence denotes so?**

**Ans:** Yes the publisher gets very irritated. We understand when he asks the narrator if his time is valuable and immediately replies that his is.

1. **How does the narrator finally mention the pointlessness of the recommendation letter?**

**Ans:** Finally the narrator explains that if he goes to any publisher, the publisher would ask him those many questions and he would try and answer them to suit them but the publisher would still go on hunting with further details. It would eventually cause a lot of embarrassment and finally the outcome would be tiredness on account of overwork. It would end but nothing would be done.

1. **What kind of advice is finally given by the narrator?**

**Ans:** The narrator finally advises that the publishers really don’t care for uncles or any of those things. It doesn’t move them and it doesn’t have any effect. They don’t really care for anything but the literature itself. They only care for books and are eager to get them, examine them no matter from where the books come and from whose pen. If she is willing to send it to a publisher he would certainly examine it and he can assure her of that.