

## **11th Standard -English**

### **Hornbill-We're Not Afraid to Die... if We Can All Be Together Summary**

In July 1976, the narrator, a 37 year-old businessman, his wife Mary, six year old son, Jonathan and seven year old daughter, Suzanne set sail from Plymouth, England. They wished to go round the world on a long sea journey as Captain James Cook had done 200 years earlier. They started in 23 metre, 30 ton wooden-hulled boat named Wavewalker.

The first part of their planned three-year, 105,000 kilometre journey passed pleasantly. They sailed down the west coast of Africa to Cape Town. They took on two crewmen-Larry Vigil, an American and Herb Seigler, a Swiss to help them cross the rough southern Indian Ocean.

On their second day out of Cape Town, they faced extremely strong winds, which blew continuously for next few weeks. Waves rose up to 15 metres. On December 25, they were 3500 kilometres east of Cape Town. Though the weather was very bad, they enjoyed Christmas and New Year's Day.

The weather changed for the worse. On January 2, there were mighty waves. They were sailing at eight knots. They slowed down the boat by dropping the small sail and fastened mooring rope in a loop across the hind part of the boat. Then they attached lifelines, put on water proof clothes and life jackets and waited for the storm. The first sign of the imminent disaster came as portentous silence. The wind dropped and the sky immediately grew dark. Then came a growing roar and a very huge wave. A tremendous explosion shook the deck. The narrator's head struck on the wheel and he flew over the side of the boat into water. He was sinking below the waves. He accepted his coming death.

Suddenly his head appeared out of water. A few metres away Wavewalker was about to turn over in water. Then a wave threw her upright. Succeeding waves threw the narrator around the deck like a rag doll. His left ribs cracked. His mouth was filled with blood and broken teeth. He, somehow, found the wheel and lined up the stern for the next wave. There was water everywhere on the ship, but he could not leave his place in order to investigate the situation. Suddenly his wife, Mary, opened the door in the deck and shouted that they were sinking as the decks were broken.

The narrator asked her to take the wheel. Then he moved quickly to the door. Larry and Herb were pumping water out of the ship. The wooden beams had broken. The whole starboard side had bulged inwards. Clothes, crockery, charts, tins and toys moved around noisily in water. He crawled into the children's cabin. Sue had got a big bump on her head. He had no time to attend to her.

He found a hammer, screws and canvas and started repair work. He managed to stretch canvas and secure water proof hatch covers across the gaping holes. Most of the water was now being deflected over the side. Then the hand pumps started to block up with debris. The electric pump had a short circuit. Water level rose up dangerously. He found that their two spare hand pumps had been pulled away by currents along with the forestay sail, the jib, the dinghies and the main anchor. He searched another electric pump, connected it to an outpipe and water was pumped out throughout night. They got no replies from their Mayday calls. Sue's head had swollen alarmingly. She had two enormous black eyes and a deep cut on her arm.

On the morning of January 3, the pumps had reduced the amount of water on board. Each of them took rest for two hours turn by turn. They had survived for 15 hours since the wave hit the Wavewalker, but she was not strong enough to take them to Australia. He checked the charts. He calculated that there were two small islands a few hundred kilometres to the east. He hoped to reach Le Amsterdam, a French scientific base. On January 4, after 36 hours of continuous pumping, they reached the last few centimetres of water.

Now they had to keep pace with the water still coming in. Mary found some corned beef and cracker biscuits.

They ate their first meal in almost two days. Their relief was short lived. At 4 pm black clouds began building up. Within an hour, the wind was back to 40 knots. The seas were getting higher. Throughout the night, the weather became worse. By dawn on January 5, their situation was extremely dangerous. The narrator went in to comfort the children. Jon asked if they were going to die. The narrator tried to assure him that they could make it. Then Jon said. "We aren't afraid of dying if we can all be together." The narrator could find no words to respond. He determined to fight the sea. To protect the weak starboards side, he decided to stop the ship with the undamaged port-hull facing the on coming waves. He used an improvised sea anchor of heavy nylon rope and two 22 litre plastic barrels of paraffin. More water rushed in through the broken planks in the evening.

On the morning of January 6, the wind became less severe. The narrator got a reading on the sextant. He made quick calculations. She came in and gave him a card she had made. She had drawn caricatures of Mary and the narrator. It also had a message expressing love and thanks. At 2 p.m., after checking calculations, the narrator asked Larry to steer a course of 185 degrees. He could then expect to see an island at about 5 p.m. Then he went below, climbed on his bunk and dozed off. He woke up at 6 p.m. Jon entered and asked if he could embrace his Daddy. She was right behind him. They called him the best daddy in the whole world and the best captain. They informed him that they had found the island.

The narrator rushed on deck. He saw the outline of the island of Ile Amsterdam. That night they anchored offshore. The next morning all 28 inhabitants of the island cheered them and helped them ashore. After reaching the land, the narrator thought of Larry and Herbie. They had been cheerful under direst stress, Mary had stayed at the wheel for those crucial hours. Then he thought of his seven year old girl, who did not want them to worry about her head injury and of the six-year old boy who was not afraid to die..