



Cat And Mouse

We are some ways out when the radio crackles into life.

“...harbourmaster...on the way...incoming 80 knots...all ships... return...”

My brother grabs the tuning dial, trying to get a clearer signal, as we look at my father questioningly. He, in turn, leans out of the cabin, glancing up at the sky. There are a few scattered clouds besmirching the otherwise azure blue sky, but in this lea side of the island, the weather seems no threat. Dad shrugs but begins to run our boat around to head back out of the bay and return to the mainland.

As we move out into the open water, the wind picks up noticeably. Waves that gently lapped at our boat half an hour ago, now claw their way up the sides, splashing onto the deck. Our boat begins to pitch like a rocking chair, up, down, up, down, as Dad guns the motor to increase our speed homewards.

Rounding the edge of the island ten minutes later, I feel the first prickling of alarm. The mainland seems miles away, a tiny pinprick against a rapidly darkening sky, where the smattering of candy floss puffs has been rudely shoved away by an incoming herd of boulder grey bull clouds.

The rain begins. At first, it is a light misting that sprinkles our hair and clothes with delicate droplets, but it rapidly becomes a downpour, soaking us to the skin. We huddle inside the tiny steering cabin, the roof offering small respite as the rain lashes in through the open aperture, shotting pinprick at our exposed faces. My father’s grip on the wheel tightens, his face a mask of concentration as he resolutely points the bow towards home.

The wind picks up, roaring like a tiger, its paws sending the waves crashing into our boat, threatening to swamp us. Dad shouts “HANG ON!” as we try to power through the herd of white horses. It feels like a rollercoaster, though without any of the fun element, as my stomach rolls, trying to retain equilibrium. My brother has gone ashy green and it’s no surprise when he vomits his lunch into a pail. His frightened eyes meet mine: are we going to make it?

Minutes pass like hours, as we fight the great sea cat who seems intent on playing with our



tiny craft. We are batted this and that, drawing closer to the harbour before being swept back out again. We are powerless, subject to the tigress's whims as she toys with us. Time after time we try to make a breakthrough in the waves, only to have to turn away to avoid another voluminous mountain of water. Fear grips me and I begin to pray. A glance at my brother tells me he is doing the same, eyes down, lips moving rapidly.

Dad slows the motor and I look up. Is this it? Are we giving up? He shakes his head: No. his hand grips the throttle, eyes narrowed, scanning the horizon. A huge wave crashes into us, the boat tips slightly and I scream, but this is the moment Dad had been waiting for. He slams the motor back into life and like an F1 driver off the grid, shoots the boat into motion.

The playful sea cat is caught napping as we fly forwards. A wave is sent crashing towards us, but it is too late, we shoot in front of it. The harbour wall is now mere meters away. I grip the seat, urging us onwards and with another surge of the engine, we finally sweep through. Fractious marine kitty pounds the harbour wall in frustration, sending plumes of water upwards, but it is no good, we have escaped. I let out the breath I didn't even realise I was holding and gently ease my brother's white knuckled grip from the side of the boat, as Dad guides us through the sheltered harbour walls to our dock. These mice have survived the great sea cat's game, we have emerged shaken but unscathed, we are safe.

EXPLANATION FOCUS

1. Why has the author used ellipses in the message that comes from the radio?
2. Find three images where the sea is compared to a giant cat.
3. Is this an effective comparison?
4. What is the effect of describing Dad as "an F1 driver off the grid" as he "slams the motor back into life"?
5. What effect does it have to describe the waves as "a herd of white horses" and a "voluminous mountain of water"?

VIPERS QUESTIONS

V

What does it mean for her stomach to "retain its equilibrium"?

I

As the boat moves into the storm area, two images are used to describe the clouds. What are they and how do they help the reader understand what is happening in the scene?

V

Find three phrases that describe how scared the children feel.

I

How do you think Dad feels during this encounter with the sea cat? Find some phrases that show this.

V

Find a phrase which tells you how the sea cat feels at the end of the "chase"?