

Student handout 2.3

The shipwreck

Part one

“More than an hour elapsed between the first alarm and the sinking of the cruise ship ‘The Queen Maddy’. Thus the passengers were able to organise themselves a little before entering the rescue vessels. A heavy storm had caused the ship to crash into an oil tanker, resulting in the shipwreck.

About half a day later some of the rescue vessels landed on a small rocky island. It was oval-shaped, about 1.5 km long and half as wide and partly covered by lush woods. There was no other island within reasonable distance. This rather sunny island was not inhabited, apart from the family Richalone, who lived in a luxurious villa on the top of the hill and owned the whole island.

Years ago, this family had settled on the island, hardly keeping contact with the outside world; they merely arranged the monthly delivery of fresh food, petrol, and all sorts of other goods that they needed. Their life was well organised: they produced their own electricity, could afford to buy enough food and drink, and had all the modern comforts they wished for. In the past, the owner had been a very successful businessman. After a conflict with the authorities over a tax issue, he had become disillusioned with life and decided from then on to avoid all contact with the outside world.

The owner of the villa had observed the rescue vessels landing on his pretty island and approached the shipwrecked people.”

Part two

“The owner of the island decided to allow the shipwrecked people to stay for some time. He expected them to pay for services and food from his reserves. As long as there was food left from the ship, he refused to sell them anything at all.

There were 13 shipwrecked people. There was Victor, his pregnant wife Josepha, and their two children (3 and 7 years old). Abramovitch, 64, was a rich jewel merchant. He was the oldest member of the group and had no relatives or friends. He had a collection of golden rings, diamonds and other precious jewels with him. John, Kate, Leo and Alfred were four young friends who were strong, healthy and very skilful. They had lived together in an alternative community house and had refurbished the house they lived in themselves.

Maria, a lawyer working part-time at a university, could only walk very slowly due to problems with her left leg and hip (the result of an accident). She was accompanied by Max, her assistant at university, as they were travelling to the US in order to give a lecture at a conference and to discuss the publication of a book with a publisher. Both were specialists in penal law, but not gifted with their hands. Last but not least, there was Marko and his girlfriend Vicky, both members of the boat crew who, at the last moment, had taken as much as they could carry from the ship’s storeroom: cans of food, biscuits, oil and some cooking pans. All those shipwrecked had some money with them, but the boatswain Marko carried a large amount, which he had stolen from an apartment in the last port they had called at.

On the island there was a small, old shed on the hillside quite near the sea. It had only one room that could serve as a primitive shelter for two or three people.”

Part three

“The shipwrecked people also had to decide what to do with the food reserves the boatswain had taken with him, and which he did not intend to share. In fact, sharing would have meant diminishing his and his girlfriend’s chances of survival.”

Part four

“The shipwrecked people decided that the food should be shared, without any compensation. They forced Marko to hand over his provisions by appealing to his sense of moral obligation. After about a week there was no food left and the only solution was to try to get some food from the owner of the villa.”