

The Derby

Jody raced through the forest faster than any animal she'd ever seen. Evergreen branches whipped dew against her face, which seemed to refresh rather than slow her as she moved at an increasingly rapid pace. Suddenly, the floor of the forest dropped away, and Jody's stomach moved into her throat as she hurtled down towards a pristine sheet of blue water. She couldn't wait to see what the landscape was like on the ocean floor. As she moved herself into a diving position and approached the water's surface, she was jolted by a rude BEEP!...BEEP!...BEEP!

She groaned, opened her eyes, and poked her head from under a blanket, taking in slivers of the grey-hued, still-dim room.

"Up and at 'em, kiddo!" Jody heard her grandpa's gravelly but good-natured voice, "The early bird gets the worm."

She groaned again and wondered what excuses might buy her a few more minutes of sleep. She loved her grandfather, but his fondness for repeating overly common phrases, combined with his early morning perkiness, could sometimes be a bit too much. Squinting, she pulled the blanket from her face and took in the hotel room. The red, glowing numerals of the cheap, digital clock on the nightstand read 4:45 AM, and although the sky outside the windows was still pitch black, Jody's grandpa, father and brother Saul sat fully clothed, looking as though they'd been up for hours.

"Come on, kiddo. Shake a leg! We've got fish to catch," said Jody's grandpa cheerfully. Jody groaned again at her grandpa's latest tired, yet spunky, phrase and threw her head back under her blankets.

Saul's voice as he muttered, "Let's just leave her; she'll only get in the way," was all the motivation she needed. Glaring at her brother, Jody threw off the covers, grabbed her fishing clothes, and headed to the bathroom to change. No matter how much she tried to pretend she didn't care what her brother thought, his low opinion of her always got under her skin.

Truth be told, Jody didn't really enjoy the fishing aspect of their annual family trip, and was even a little grossed out by the idea of pulling live fish from the sea. She often went an entire trip without touching her pole, letting her brother reel in any fish that struck her line. Although she hated to admit it even to herself she hoped that he would someday appreciate her rather than treat her as though she were a terrible burden. She sometimes felt as though nobody in her family was even aware that she was around. On the fishing trips, at least, the boat was small enough that she was guaranteed some

interaction with them.

The sun still wasn't visible when they arrived at the docks, but the eastern sky was beginning to show hints of a fiery orange color. "It's going to be a clear day, and the fish were biting like mad yesterday," said a leathery but friendly voice that Jody associated with the sea itself.

"Hi, Captain Steve!" she smiled, "I hope you stocked up on cocoa."

"I knew you were coming, so I bought three boxes," he replied as he pulled his boat flush with the dock and helped Jody's family board The Golden Otter. Jody made a beeline for the galley and emerged on the deck a few seconds later with two steaming cups of cocoa.

Her grandpa's eyes twinkled as he accepted his cup from her. "Thanks, small fry," he said. "This looks perfect!"

Jody's joy at her grandpa's approval was short-lived. Even before she had absorbed it fully, she felt her heart sink once more at her brother's words.

"OK, everyone. Break out your cash for the derby," he said, holding out his hat. "You all know the rules. The largest fish on someone's line takes the entire pot."

Jody tried to hide her reaction as she turned away and faced the railing. For the last four or five years, Saul had been getting her dad and grandpa to form an impromptu fishing derby, but Jody knew he had no intention of letting her join in. If she tried to throw in five dollars of her babysitting money, he would tell her she was too young. She stared out at the harbor, biting her lower lip, determined to look as disinterested as possible.

"Don't you want to be in the fishing derby, sweetie?" asked her grandpa, "I can lend you some money if you need it." Jody couldn't believe her ears. Was she finally going to be allowed to participate in the contest? She pulled a crumpled five dollar bill out of her pocket and held it out to her brother.

"I don't think so," he sneered, "You don't even fish."

Jody took a deep breath and met his eyes. She felt her grandpa's silent support and stood up even straighter. "What's the matter, Saul?" she asked, "Are you scared?"

She knew she had won that particular battle when he snatched the bill from her hand. Her grandpa gave her a quick hug as she walked back to the railing. "Atta girl," he whispered, "you'll show him!"

Jody knocked back two more cups of cocoa, until the approach of the jetty made her stomach tense up. At the jetty, the outgoing current of the harbor met the incoming waves of the ocean, which often resulted in the roughest water of the entire trip. Once beyond the jetty, they'd be on the open sea, but getting beyond it always made Jody

nervous.

"It'll be OK, kiddo," her grandpa said reassuringly as the boat started to move up and down, with the waves creating a jarring slap each time. The color drained from Jody's face as the boat came down with a particularly large slap that dislodged some cups and boxes from the galley. However, after that huge crash, the sea smoothed, and they were soon past the jetty and puttering out to sea.

"OK, Jody. Since it's your first fishing derby, you get first dibs on which pole you'd like," said Captain Steve. Jody looked carefully and chose the sturdiest looking pole on the very back of the boat, and with that, the fishing derby was underway.

Two hours later, Jody was regretting the pole she'd chosen. Saul had caught three fish, including a 13-pound salmon. Each time he reeled one in, he made sure she heard about it. Her father had caught two fish, including an eleven-pounder. Although her grandfather had caught only one fish, it weighed a whopping 17 pounds, so he was in the lead. Jody, however, had not had such luck. For the past two hours, she had merely sat, staring at her pole which had moved about as much as a tree trunk on a windless day. Saul's taunts continued to wash over her, and she'd had to swallow the tears that threatened to spill more than once.

Suddenly, her pole lurched toward the ocean, and her line sizzled out with a high-pitched whine. "Dad, Dad!" she shouted, "I've got something on my line, and it's big!"

She tried mightily to reel in her catch, but she continued to lose line. Something had grabbed her hook and was headed the other way; only whatever it was, was so big that the line didn't even slow it down. Captain Steve began to maneuver the boat so that they could follow her catch before she ran out of line and lost whatever it was. Jody continued to reel valiantly for about 10 minutes. Suddenly, they all saw a giant fin crest the water in the distance. "Was that a shark?" Saul whispered, awestruck.

"I think so," replied their dad, and in her shock Jody forgot what she was doing for a moment. In that second, her line went slack, and her pole returned to its original position pointing at the sky. She regained her composure and began to reel again furiously, but it was too late, the shark was gone.

Jody felt her heart sink. She couldn't even look at Saul, not wanting to see the gloating on his face. Quietly, she put her pole away and retired to the galley for the remainder of the trip to drown her sorrows in cocoa.

When they got back to the dock, Jody was still feeling depressed. It didn't help that her brother jabbed her in the side with his elbow as he passed by and hissed "Loser!" under his breath.

She watched sullenly as her brother handed over the derby money to her grandpa.

"Here you go, Grandpa," said Saul, "Your prize for your 17 pound fish! Don't spend it all in one place."

"Now, wait just a second, Saul," said her grandfather. "I believe that you said the biggest fish on someone's line won the derby, not the biggest fish landed."

Jody's grandfather winked at her as he tossed the small stack of money to his granddaughter.

"But that's not what I meant, Grandpa," Saul protested, dismayed. "Jody only had one bite, and she let it get away."

"Well, that will teach you to be more careful with what you say," chuckled Grandpa. "It seems to me that she earned this prize money fair and square. Maybe next year she'll give you some pointers."

Jody flushed with pride and grinned as she envisioned ribbing her brother about her "catch" for the next twelve months. "Well," she told herself, "I guess it's not such a disaster of a day after all!"

1. Why was the family up so early in the morning?

- A. Because the family were early risers.
- B. To go on their annual fishing trip.
- C. To see the fiery, orange sunrise.

2. Which fishing pole did Jody choose?

- A. The one her grandfather recommended.
- B. The one that looked the strongest.
- C. The one that was closest to her.

3. Why was Jody sad when her brother announced the fishing derby was starting?

- A. She thought she wouldn't be allowed to join the derby again.
- B. She thought she was too young to be able to win the derby.
- C. She felt he was interrupting a special moment with her grandfather.

4. What did Jody most wish for on the fishing trip?

- A. That she would win the derby and get her money back.
- B. That she would catch a big fish and impress her brother.
- C. That her brother would appreciate her as his sister.

5. What did Captain Steve bring that made Jody happy?

- A. Packages of hot cocoa for them to drink.
- B. A good selection of new fishing poles.
- C. Strong chairs on the boat to fish from.

6. When did Jody start to feel sick?

- A. When the boat hit the choppy water.
- B. When she realized she wasn't catching fish.
- C. When she drank too much hot cocoa.

7. What was the main idea of this story?

- A. A person can win if the person has the right attitude.
- B. How something appears depends on who is looking at it.
- C. Things don't always turn out the way you might expect.

8. What did Jody's grandfather commonly do that annoyed Jody?

- A. He babied her around her brother.
- B. He overused common phrases.
- C. He woke her up early in the morning.

9. Why did Jody associate Captain Steve's voice with the sea?

- A. She only saw him during the annual fishing trip.
- B. His voice sounded like the movement of the ocean.
- C. Because he was always talking about the ocean.

10. How did Jody sometimes feel when she was around her family?

- A. Unnoticed and unimportant.
- B. Like she was a problem for them.
- C. That they had a low opinion of her.

- 11. How did Jody surprise Saul on the fishing trip?**
- A. She didn't get seasick.
 - B. She knew how to fish.
 - C. She caught a shark.
- 12. When did Saul call Jody a `loser'?**
- A. When she tried to join the fishing derby.
 - B. After she lost the shark from her line.
 - C. After her grandfather gave her the money.
- 13. What was Jody's main problem in the story?**
- A. She lost the shark she had caught.
 - B. She felt that her brother didn't like her.
 - C. She risked losing all her babysitting money.
- 14. What was The Golden Otter in the story?**
- A. What the family called the fishing derby.
 - B. The nickname the captain gave to Jody.
 - C. The name of Captain Steve's fishing boat.
- 15. Why was Jody glad to go on the fishing trip?**
- A. She would have close interaction with her family.
 - B. She hoped to win the fishing derby this year.
 - C. She loved to watch the sunrise from the boat.
- 16. How will Jody's brother probably treat her on the next fishing trip?**
- A. He will be nicer to her on the next trip.
 - B. He will ignore her like he always has.
 - C. He will see her as serious competition.

17. Where was Jody at the very beginning of the story?

- A. At her grandfather's house.
- B. In a forest near the ocean.
- C. In the middle of a dream.

18. Why did Jody's grandfather decide Jody should be the winner of the fishing derby?

- A. He wanted everyone to be happy like him.
- B. He wanted Jody to feel good about herself.
- C. He was very angry at Saul for being mean.

19. What caused Jody to get out of bed when all she wanted to do was sleep?

- A. Realizing everyone else was dressed.
- B. Her grandfather's perky greeting.
- C. Her brother's comment towards her.

20. What word best describes what Jody's grandfather was like with Jody?

- A. Accepting.
- B. Encouraging.
- C. Intervening.