

Safety and Danger



- A. Read the extra from a short story, ignoring the missing paragraphs and try to imagine what period of time it is set in.
- B. Five paragraphs have been removed from the story. Choose from paragraphs A-F the one which best fits each gap (1-5). There is one extra paragraph which you do not need to use. Pay attention to the words and phrases highlighted in yellow – they are the discourse markers you need to pay attention to when doing a gapped-text exercise.

The war saved my life. I really do not know what I would have done without it. On 7 August, the day war was declared on Russia, I enlisted as a volunteer gunner in the artillery for the duration and was instructed to report to a garrison artillery regiment in Cracow.

1

I should say that I joined the army because it was my civic duty, yet I was even more glad to enlist because I knew at that time I had to do something, I had to subject myself to the rigours of a harsh routine that would divert me from my intellectual work. I had reached an impasse, and the impossibility of ever proceeding further filled me with morbid despair.

2

Inside the place was busy, the air noisy with speculation about the war. It was humid and hot, the atmosphere suffused with the reek of beer and cigar smoke. The patrons were mostly young men, students from the nearby art schools, clean-shaven, casually and unaffectedly dressed. So I was a little surprised to catch a glimpse in one corner of a uniform. I pushed through the crowd to see who it was.

3

Georg was wearing the uniform of an officer, a lieutenant, in the Medical Corps. He looked at me

candidly and without resentment and, of course, without recognition. He seemed much the same as the last time I had seen him, at once ill-looking and possessed of a sinewy energy. I introduced myself and told him I was pleased to see a fellow soldier as I myself had just enlisted.

30 'It's your civic duty,' he said, his voice sounding slightly slurred. 'Have a cigar.'

4

'I'm a rich man,' he said as he filled our glasses. 'Where're you posted?'

'Galicia.'

35 'Ah, the Russians are coming.' He paused. 'I want to go somewhere cold and dark. I detest this sun and this city. Why aren't we fighting the Eskimos? I hate daylight. Maybe I could declare war on the Lapps. One-man army.'

40 'Bit lonely, no?'

'I want to be lonely. All I do is pollute my mind talking to people... I want a dark, cold, lonely war. Please.'

'You'd better keep that to yourself.'

5

45 I looked into Georg's ugly face, his thin eyes and glossy lips, and felt a kind of love for him and his honesty. I clinked my glass against his and asked God to preserve me from sanity as well.

- A It was obvious that he was already fairly drunk. He sat strangely hunched over, staring intently at the table-top. His posture and the ferocious concentration of his gaze clearly put people off as the three other seats around his table remained unoccupied. I told a waiter to bring a half litre of Heuniger Wein to the table and then sat down opposite him.
- B He offered me a Trabuco, those ones that have a straw mouthpiece because they are so strong. I declined – at that time I did not smoke. When the wine arrived he insisted on paying for it.
- C In my elation I was reluctant to go straight home to pack my bags. My family had by now all returned to Vienna, so I took a taxi to the Café Museum.
- D It was the striking figure of a soldier who had a vague air of familiarity about him. I knew instinctively, however, that I had never seen the man before. I decided to engage him in conversation.
- E He raised his glass. 'God preserve me from sanity.' I thought of something Nietzsche had said: 'Our life, our happiness, is beyond the north, beyond ice, beyond death.'
- F By the time I reached the Café Museum, it was about six o'clock in the evening (I liked this café because its interior was modern; its square rooms were lined with square honey-coloured oak panelling, hung with prints of the drawings of Charles Dana Gibson).

C. Read the whole passage again and answer the questions:

- Why did the writer join the army?
  - What did he think was out of place in the café?
  - Why was Georg sitting alone?
  - What did Georg confess to the writer?
- D. Find words in the text and in the missing paragraphs which are used to describe the attitude and personality of the writer and Georg. Look up in the dictionary any words you don't know. Which of the two characters seems the more pessimistic?

