

Unseen extract 1: *All Quiet on the Western Front*

Read the extract carefully. It is taken from *All Quiet on the Western Front* by Erich Maria Remarque, first published in 1929. It is narrated by Paul Bäumer, a young man of nineteen who, along with friends, joins the German army voluntarily after listening to the stirring patriotic speeches of his teacher. In this extract, Bäumer and his comrades have just undergone a bombardment.

Sample question

Explore the significance of compassion in this extract.

Remember to include in your answer relevant detailed analysis of the ways that Remarque shapes meanings.

Extract

The shelling has stopped. I turn back to the crater and wave to the others. They scramble up and tear off their masks. We pick up the wounded man, one of us holds the arm with the splint on it. And in a group we stumble away as quickly as possible.

The cemetery has been blown to pieces. Coffins and corpses are scattered all around. They have been killed for a second time; but every corpse that was shattered saved the life of one of us.

The fence has been wrecked, the rails of the field railway on the other side have been ripped out and bent upwards, so that they point to the sky. Someone is lying on the ground in front of us. We stop. Kropp goes on alone with the wounded man.

The man on the ground is a recruit. He has blood smeared all over one hip; he is so exhausted that I reach for my flask, which has tea with rum in it. Kat holds back my hand and bends over him. 'Where did you cop it, mate?'

He moves his eyes, too weak to answer.

Carefully we cut away his trousers. He moans. 'It's OK, OK, it'll soon be better...'

If he's been hit in the stomach then he mustn't drink anything. He has thrown up, and that is a good sign. We expose the hip area. It is just a pulp of torn flesh and splintered bone. The joint has been hit. This lad will never walk again.

I wet my fingers and run them across his forehead, then give him a drink. Some life comes into his eyes. It's only now that we realise that his right arm is bleeding as well.

Kat spreads out two field dressings as wide as he can, so that they cover the wound. I look around for some cloth, so that I can tie it up loosely. We haven't got anything. So I cut more of the wounded man's trousers away so that I can use a piece of his underpants as a bandage. But he isn't wearing any. I look at him more closely. It's the blond lad from earlier on.

Meanwhile Kat has fetched a couple more field dressings from the pockets of dead soldiers, and we place them carefully on the wound. The lad is looking at us with a fixed gaze.

'We'll go and get a stretcher now.'

But he opens his mouth and whispers, 'Stay here -'

Kat says, 'We'll be back in a minute. We're going to get a stretcher for you.'

It is impossible to say whether he understands or not; he whimpers like a child behind us as we go: 'Stay here -'

Kat looks all round and then whispers, 'Wouldn't it be best just to take a revolver and put him out of his misery?'

The lad is not likely to survive being moved, and at the very most he'll last a couple of days. But everything he's been through so far will be nothing compared to those few days until he dies. At the moment he is still in shock and can't feel anything. Within an hour he'll be a screaming mass of unbearable agonies, and the few days he still has left to live will just be an incessant raging torture. And what difference does it make to anyone whether he has to suffer them or not?

I nod. 'You're right Kat. The best thing would be a bullet.'

'Give me a gun,' he says, and stops walking. I can see that he is set on it. We look around - but we're not alone any more. A small group is gathering near us, and heads are appearing out of the shell holes and trenches.

We bring a stretcher.

Kat shakes his head. 'Such young lads -' He says it again: 'Such young innocent lads -'

Acknowledgement of copyright-holders and publishers

© From *All Quiet on the Western Front* by Erich Maria Remarque. Published by Bodley Head. Reprinted by permission of The Random House Group Limited.