

170 dressed like liveried⁹ footmen, with flat military caps on their heads—and rifles which they were pointing straight at the two friends.

The fishing rods dropped from their hands and went floating down the river.

In a matter of seconds they were seized, tied up, hustled along, thrown into a boat and carried across to the island. **H**

Behind the building which they had thought deserted they saw a group of about twenty German soldiers.

A sort of hairy giant who was sitting astride a chair and smoking a large clay pipe asked them in excellent French:

180 “Well, messieurs, did the fishing go well?”

One of the soldiers placed at the officer’s feet the net full of fish which he had been careful to bring along. The Prussian smiled and said:

“Well, well! I can see you didn’t do badly at all! . . . But I have to deal with a very different matter. Now, listen to me carefully, and don’t get alarmed . . . As far as I am concerned you are a couple of spies sent out here to keep an eye on me. I’ve caught you and I’ve every right to shoot you. You were obviously pretending to fish as a cover for your real purposes. It’s too bad for you that you’ve fallen into my hands. But war is war . . . Now, since you’ve come out here past your own lines, you’re bound to have a password so you can get back.

190 Just give me that password and I’ll spare your lives.” **I**

The two friends, ghastly pale, stood there side by side with their hands trembling. They said nothing.

“Nobody will ever get to know about it,” continued the officer. “You will go back without any trouble, and the secret will go with you . . . If you refuse to cooperate, you’ll die—straight away. So take your choice!”

They stood there motionless, keeping their mouths firmly shut.

The Prussian, who was still quite calm, pointed in the direction of the river and said:

200 “Just think! In five minutes you’ll be at the bottom of that river. In five minutes! You must have families. Think of them!”

The rumbling of the cannon was still coming from Mont Valérien.

The two fishermen simply stood there, refusing to speak. The German now gave some orders in his own language. Then he moved his chair some distance away from the prisoners. Twelve men marched up and formed a line twenty yards from them with their rifles at their sides.

“I’ll give you one minute to make up your minds,” called the officer. “And not two seconds more.”

Then he jumped to his feet, went up to the two Frenchmen, took Morissot by the arm, and led him to one side. Then he said to him in a very low voice:

210 “Quick! Just let me have that password! Your friend won’t know you’ve told me. I’ll make it look as though I’ve taken pity on you both.”

H GRAMMAR AND STYLE

Reread lines 174–175.

By using a **compound predicate**, Maupassant is able to describe a series of actions in one concise sentence.

I MAKE INFERENCES

What can you infer about the Prussian soldiers from their actions toward the fishermen?

9. **liveried**: uniformed.