

The Executions

“Five more tomorrow!” That was all he had said, our commander, my commander. I never knew him personally, it’s true, but I nonetheless respected him. After all, he’s our leader. We’re from the same country. So why would he turn on his own men? I’d rather take my chances on the battlefield. The odds are better. With a little luck you can manage to stay alive. But this is completely different. Where can you run? Desertion is out of the question. If the enemy doesn’t get you, the firing squad will. Or most likely, you’ll be shot on sight. Running away from battle. Refusing to obey orders.

Five of them, all good soldiers—loyal, courageous, strong—five good soldiers, all of them dead. Guns to their heads.

And five more tomorrow....

The sky is an even gray. I stumble along a dirt road. It’s a path really, not a road. I seem to have walked on it once before. It runs along the edge of a field, a cornfield. The stalks are tall and green, but the ears aren’t ripe yet. We’ll be moving on before the corn is ready to eat.

I come to an abandoned cottage. I quickly slip inside, closing the door gently behind me. There are three small rooms, none of them with furniture, each completely bare. The walls are white—dirty white, almost brown—with small windows close to the ceiling.

I stumble aimlessly from wall to wall, banging my head at each turn. Standing on tiptoe, I look out one of the windows, only to see my own reflection in the glass.

Why should I be one of the next five? What have I done to deserve it?

I pace back and forth, from room to room, frantically. Then, with both hands on my head, I slump into a corner. Surely they will not take me. Surely I will not be next.

It’s almost dark now. I turn out the lights and huddle there, my knees pressed against my chest. Of course, he will find me. It’s only a matter of time.