

In the dim light of early dawn, in a small prison yard of a small Spanish town, a loyalist prisoner, with a thin white face and fists so tightly clenched that a bead of blood issued from his white chapped knuckles, stood facing a firing squad. The tension of that moment amplified the slightest sound and the high prison walls made vibrant the voice of the commanding officer. "Attention!!" At his command, his subordinates draw themselves up, in unison, snapped their rifles straight up to their sides and stiffened. The rhythmic sound of the action was followed by a rhythmic pause, a deadly silence, in which the next command was to be given. But in that silence, something unexpectedly happened, something that broke the line of rhythm. The condemned man coughed and cleared his throat.

Everyone present at that drama were shocked. The simple act of the central figure of the drama somehow put the rhythmic force out of motion. The community officer, he nerves wrought to high pitch, became disconcerted. The interruption had broken the concatenation of the military procedure, had disrupted the officer's dogmatic mind. He turned and looked at the condemned man for a moment to recover himself but a curious [xxx] suddenly took possession of his brain. He could not think of the words that were to phrase his next command "attention." Was it the command "present arms"? In his delirium he decided to proceed again at the beginning. "Attention!" The subordinates, though still at attention, responded by repeating slight brusque movements of throwing back their shoulders. But, still, the mind of the officer would not function.

He knew what he wanted to say but could not formulate the words. Only a rhythmic instinct drove him on. He shouted something inarticulate. The men obeyed instinctively and presented arms. Now the drama was in rhythm again. Another moment's pause while the men took aim at the condemned man but another interruption followed. At the back of the officer was a small door which led to the executive offices of the prison. From it suddenly a man appeared and shouted "stop!" Six men stood tense, caught in a compelling rhythm. Six men, as they heard the command to stop, fired.

The tension of the scene had set in motion a strange rhythm. The awful silence amplified the slightest sound and much refined the manner of the officer as he addressed his men. "Attention." At his command six soldiers

A realization stole over him of the utter futility of it all. He became vague and uncertain of the cause he was fighting for. Who was right? Was either side right? Would not the war end with the same cynical results of all previous wars—privileges for the few and hardships for the many? One thing seemed certain to him, that it was wrong to kill useful men.

The rich themselves have sent a petition on behalf of the condemned man, for they were loathe to put to death one of Spain's most brilliant men, a poet and a humanitarian who had contributed much to the enjoyment of his countrymen

into the prison yard. Instinctively the officer knew that those footsteps were bringing a reprieve and instantly his mind cleared. "Stop!" he screamed frantically at the firing squad. Six men stood poised with their rifles. One man of the six was caught in a rhythm. One man – when he heard a scream to stop, fired. The one man whose rifle was loaded with a blank cartridge.

In that tense moment, a rhythm was set in motion.

Cream-like numbness enshrouded his mind.

A mind was enshrouded in a cream-like numbness.

At that tense moment, a rhythm was set in motion, a rhythm that was to be broken by a volley of fire. Everyone in that drama was caught up in it.

The scene was caught in a pulsating tension.

He could think of no other word but attention.

After the command "attention" he

Try as he would, he could not

already at attention, pushed back their shoulders. The scene was in rhythm again, but the mind of the officer could not function. Strive as he would, he could not think of the next thing to say. In desperation he shouted and made a sound that was inarticulate. The men obeyed and presented arms. He shouted again and in the silence that followed, the men took aim. Suddenly from a door near the back of the officer, there approached a man tense with excitement and with a document in his hand. "Stop!" he commanded. Six men stood there, caught in a compelling rhythm. Six men, as they heard the command to stop, fired.

and the power of the church and together they had caroused, had sat at nights around café tables, and enjoyed evenings of metaphysical discussion. At times they had argued on the deletion of government. Their technical differences were friendly then. But now, those technical differences had wrought misery and upheaval over all Spain, and had brought his friend to die by the firing squad. That morning as they met for the first time since the war, never a word did they exchange, only a faint smile of recognition had passed between them.

Interrogative thoughts raced feverishly through the officer's mind. What technical differences could justify killing his best friend. But why think? Why reason? Since the civil war, what good was reason? He must shut out the past, only the future mattered now. The future – a world in which he was to be deprived of having old friends.