

## Blanks

Excerpt; first published in *JMWW*

This is the place where it used to happen.

It was just three days ago that Mother mentioned this to me, and I've been coming here since, with Grandpa. He crouches under a tree, choosing the same spot every time, and watches me meander around in my shorts and sandals. Why do I feel Mother would have told me nothing had I not accidentally discovered this place one boring afternoon?

I am fascinated just being here, where a lone concrete pillar stands tall in dry dirt, upright as if at attention, surrounded by more yards of dirt. Beyond, there is a boundary of soccer-ball sized rocks and then thick-stemmed trees whose leaves seem broader and denser than normal, like they are withholding old secrets.

This place is bordered by the river on two sides. This made the location ideal for the squad, said Mother, but she didn't say how. She had crouched behind one of the trees as a little child and watched an execution at dawn. At that time, she didn't know anything about those men in crisp foreign uniforms, she said, except that they were there because of a big war that made even the old weep.

There is hardly any wind here, but when it blows I hear the sounds just as Mother described: the deep gunshots, almost in unison, then a violent shuffling of ravens, and cawing: *ah ah-ha-ha-ha ah*; shrill, disturbed, staccato, often in chorus, like someone being stabbed repeatedly.

>>>>