

Conscience Round

By

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EXT. YARD - MORNING

A PRISONER stands in front of a concrete wall. Her hands are tied behind her back and she is blindfolded.

Beside her, a young LIEUTENANT rolls a cigarette. He passes it to her.

LIEUTENANT
Cigarette?

She ignores the offer. He lights up.

PRISONER
May I remove the blindfold?

LIEUTENANT
Afraid not.

PRISONER
Will I be shot in the head or the heart?

LIEUTENANT
The heart's the idea. Four of my chaps will be aiming at it.

He indicates the men, off screen.

LIEUTENANT (CONT'D)
Bloody good marksmen.

PRISONER
I hope so.

LIEUTENANT
Righto. Well... nothing personal.
War could end tomorrow.

The sound of boots approaching. The Lieutenant looks off-screen, and salutes.

LIEUTENANT (CONT'D)
Captain.

The unseen Captain's voice is older, gruff, and impatient.

CAPTAIN (O.S.)
I don't have long, whole bloody
schedule's up in smoke today.

(CONTINUED)

LIEUTENANT

This is the, er, the condemned,
sir.

CAPTAIN (O.S.)

Yes, I can see that, Lieutenant.
Are your men ready?

LIEUTENANT

Armed and waiting, sir.

CAPTAIN (O.S.)

All right, go ahead. And put out
that bloody cigarette, Lieutenant.

LIEUTENANT

Yes sir.

The Lieutenant stubs out the cigarette.

LIEUTENANT

It's gone, sir.

He steps to the side and raises his arm.

LIEUTENANT

Take aim. On my mark.

CAPTAIN (O.S.)

The charges, Lieutenant?

LIEUTENANT

The? Ah, yes, the... Lower weapons.

The Lieutenant produces a small notebook and reads from it.

LIEUTENANT (CONT'D)

Conspiracy, espionage, sedition,
defamatory libel-

PRISONER

Obscene libel.

LIEUTENANT

Really? Obscene libel, fabrication
of false evidence, forged identity
and fraudulence amounting to
treason. Sir.

PRISONER

Should I stand or kneel?

(CONTINUED)

LIEUTENANT
Captain, should she stand or kneel?

CAPTAIN (O.S.)
Stand.

LIEUTENANT
Stand.

The Lieutenant puts away the notebook and steps to the side.

LIEUTENANT
Take aim. On my mark.

He raises his arm in signal.

LIEUTENANT (CONT'D)
Wait! Lower weapons.
(To Captain)
The last words, sir.

CAPTAIN (O.S.)
Just hurry up, Lieutenant.

LIEUTENANT
Yes sir.
(to Prisoner)
Any last words?

PRISONER
(shouting)
Fire!

LIEUTENANT
No!

The Lieutenant flinches, then regains himself. The Prisoner laughs.

LIEUTENANT
Take aim. On MY mark.

The Lieutenant raises his arm.

LIEUTENANT (CONT'D)
Wait! Lower weapons. Lower your
weapons.
(To Captain)
Sir, there isn't a blank.

CAPTAIN (O.S.)
What?

LIEUTENANT

The conscience round sir, the blank cartridge. We're missing it.

CAPTAIN (O.S.)

Well... for God's sake, why?

LIEUTENANT

There was only the one ammo box available, sir. They're all live rounds.

CAPTAIN (O.S.)

I...don't think it matters.

LIEUTENANT

A blank is necessary, sir, for the, ah, the diffusion of responsibility.

CAPTAIN (O.S.)

The whole object of the thing is to kill her, Lieutenant, this isn't the theatre.

The Lieutenant shrugs helplessly.

LIEUTENANT

Sir, it's protocol.

CAPTAIN (O.S.)

All right. Tell your men there is one blank round.

LIEUTENANT

But...sir, they just heard me tell you that there isn't.

CAPTAIN (O.S.)

Well order them to change their minds.

LIEUTENANT

...Yes sir.

(To Men)

Listen here! One among you carries a rifle loaded with a conscience round. When you shoot the prisoner, it's possible that you will have fired the blank. So we, ah, won't know who killed the-, um, did the deed. Take aim. On my mark.

The Lieutenant raises his hand. He brings it down.

(CONTINUED)

LIEUTENANT (CONT'D)

Fire.

BOOM! Four rifles sound off. The Prisoner flinches, but remains erect. She has not been hit.

The Lieutenant inspects her.

CAPTAIN (O.S.)

Is she hit?

LIEUTENANT

Are you hit?

CAPTAIN (O.S.)

Lieutenant, did your men miss?

LIEUTENANT

She's not been hit, sir. Not the heart, not anywhere.

The Lieutenant looks around, puzzled.

LIEUTENANT (CONT'D)

Now you don't suppose...

He walks to the ammo box and looks closely at it.

LIEUTENANT (CONT'D)

Sir, it's a box of blanks!

CAPTAIN (O.S.)

What?

LIEUTENANT

They're all blank cartridges. I could have sworn they were live...

CAPTAIN (O.S.)

Oh, for God's sake, Lieutenant!

LIEUTENANT

Sorry sir. I could-

CAPTAIN (O.S.)

I don't have time for this, I'm late as it is. Tomorrow, oh-seven-hundred, and you'll be lucky not to join her.

LIEUTENANT

Yes sir.

The Lieutenant salutes. The Captain walks away.

(CONTINUED)

LIEUTENANT (CONT'D)

(to Prisoner)

Spot of luck for you, I should think. Gives you time to come up with some more appropriate last words, anyway.

She shrugs.

PRISONER

War could end tomorrow.

The Lieutenant lights up another cigarette.

LIEUTENANT

(to Men)

At ease.