

KORNEL FILIPOWICZ

The Memoir of an Anti-Hero

Translated by Anna Zaranko



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Although human life is priceless, we always act as though something had an even greater price than life . . . but what is that something?

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

“The outbreak of war found me in X, a beautiful place in the foothills where I had spent my holidays the last three years in a row.

By the end of August, almost all the summer holiday-makers had packed their bags and left on the crowded and now late-running trains. I'd been to the station twice and I'd seen the goings-on. I told myself that what the majority did was not necessarily what one ought to do – and I stayed.

So, on 5 or 6 September (I had a room in the garret of a wooden house with a little balcony, near the road), after an hour's gunfire – which, on the advice of the landlord, I'd spent in the cellar – I saw the Germans. Their equipment, discipline, briskness, bearing – they were astonishing; this was something more than a victorious army. The Poles, whom I was seeing now as prisoners – were something less than vanquished; they were destroyed. Annihilated. I want to be frank in what I write, and I have to say they did not stir even my pity. I don't consider myself completely incapable of that sentiment. But they were simply . . . disgusting. Disgusting, threadbare, dirty and brutish. Animals in rags. A slightly risky comparison, but nothing better comes to mind. I'd been in the army once, but I had no idea that the same