

THE REVISIONIST
HISTORIAN'S TALE

"Friendly coming in!"

The soldier with the soothing voice had come. White museum booties muffled his steps. He left his weapons, the sharp and the loud ones, behind roadside rock. Some say his whistle was distinctive.

He told the citizens stories of quiet insects of soft foods of hair-limbs of lazy of red trees of porch chairs of windrows of pinking shears of lavender of loose sleeves of a sweater that grew from trees of wind of tremor of transport of archive of crystal-glint of lunar surface of honey of typewritten notes of names going rusty from non-use of wind of wind of wind. They closed their eyes to go. And from the collective weight of so many eyelids collapsing, the pilings started to sink. They would soon be underground, the soldier would soon report that he had watched their houses retract, until low-growth covered the roofs. He whistled and their dogs followed him back to his weapons. The streetlights glistened against the greasepaint on his face.

For years afterward, people in this land talked about the first soldier to fell a town with bedtime stories. They wondered if it was better to be stilled into atrocity or surprised by it.

"Friendly coming out!"

THE ACTORS' TALE

Aerial stark: a theater of shifting weather patterns, of moving currents.

We looked up and saw only the things that flew against sky—heron, helicopter, one slow leaf.

Rain falling down a heavy curtain at the end. Its drops on the ground a version of applause.

THE SEISMOLOGIST'S TALE

It was fall and the soldier's stories made human piles of them.

He went directly to the center of the town and his stories spiraled outward. The few who tried to flee were held by his soothing voice. The citizens stopped. They grew tired and leaned. They grew tired and sat. Engines idled. They grew tired and sought other bodies to entwine with theirs. Warm slow cotton piles formed throughout the town. The ground grew heavy.

The center of the town sunk first. The earth's tilt was perceptible only to the animals, who knew the soldier as an earthquake-maker. But this tremor moved in a different way, had a different shape. It coned. Most dogs avoided the soldier's circles, kept watch from the town's edge. Most dogs detected in the soldier's voice a sense of mission. They detected a master beyond the soldier, though the soldier had all the trappings of an alpha human.

The leaves were thin on the trees. By the time the soldier made his final circles, only children who hadn't learned the words remained awake. Without language they felt the leaves and the leaving.

THE LINGUIST'S TALE

The soldier had been trained in the language of the people he disappeared. This language was a language of things and their ghosts.

The soldier wanted one thing and led the people to believe they wanted that thing too. They were tired, and the words he used promised the simulacra of what they already knew.

His words cooed, nested—little birds straight to their sense of self. In their view, only the foreign attacked. With the soldier's guidance, the citizens believed that mutiny was superfluous. They preferred sugar, coiling, incumbent-calm.

Yet no one saw the soldier. They only heard his words. They saw their cats hide in closets, they saw their dogs slip through small flaps toward the soldier's sounds. But they, the people, were stilled by the familiar. Geologists have captured the soldier's words, but his thoughts—well, we can only speculate on those.

THE LONE SURVIVOR'S TALE

The government has tried to recreate my life. They've given me an office, though there are no other employees or even a company goal. I work alone. I don't-work alone.

My voicemail message says, *Hello. You have reached the Lone Survivor. Unless you are dead, do not leave a message.*

They've given me a new house too. The distance between my new house and my new office is precisely that of the distance between my old house and my old office.

I never learned to drive, so the government runs a bus between my house and office. The bus driver wears dark glasses and a hood. She is the only person I see each day.

The government never anticipated having anything but records of the dead. There was no *what if?* No *how do we make a life that isn't worth living?*

Food arrives daily in packages I don't understand.