

The Loyalists



One of the most moving photographs ever taken shows a 1940 gathering of French civilians on a public street in Marseilles. They gather to witness the evacuation of historic French flags just ahead of the arrival of Nazi occupation troops. In the foreground is an older Frenchman standing proud but silent, his throat too tight with grief to allow words. He steels himself against all the unknowables this spectacle might mean. The savagery to come lives for the moment in his imagination.

He is a patriot to what no longer exists, and his only resistance is a trickle of tears beginning to cascade down his face.

Who that day, or in the lifetimes since, would begrudge him his tears? His world, along with his hopes for his family and countrymen, has succumbed to a force indifferent to the terror it brings.

Perhaps he sustains himself, and his unsteady stance at the sidewalk, with thoughts of a day of rescue, however distant. He thinks of the brave young men who have fled to the countryside and who one day must surely return in a campaign of liberation. He reasons that a nearby island nation will also help. As will the New World, which would never, he prays, long permit this cruelty.

With this, and with his tears, this patriot consoles himself.

Tonight a child sits in a darkened room. Her world too is hostage. The intruder isn't an army, or even a person. It arrives in the familiar voices of the first people she ever heard speak. It arrives in the voices who once told her that the world was safe. And predictable.

But now those voices, full of their own loss, hurt, and angry needs, don't give any sign of noticing that they are flooding a place once home to a child's games and dreams and a family's loving rituals that used to protect her.

The little girl cannot know what explosions the next day or the next moment will bring. She knows only one thing: No rescue is being mounted. The intruder, after all, isn't an outsider. It can't be defeated and it won't be redeemed.

Afraid to add to the intruder's wrath, she thinks of how to cry without sounds. Or tears. No one needs to tell her not to cry. She tells herself.