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Three Poems · Naomi Wallace

SONNET FRAMING THE THOUGHTS OF A FOREFATHER BEFORE THE PEQUOT BATTLE

This morning is like no other. I halt my horse.
My troops steady behind me. The breeze
cracks like ice against my teeth. The sleeves
of my coat of mail reflect the sky above me,
and in my wrist the birds fly. The village lies
before us. Quiet. The Braves are gone to battles
twelve miles up river. It was my plan. Clusters
of small children play by the river like flies
on a wound. I count an old man. Two
old women. A Brave, though hardly a man,
both legs gone, drags his tail-bone in the dew.
The cruelty of savages, to keep half a man
alive. I am not cruel. No man, child or beast
ever died by my hand without at least

a prayer. I pray for my soldiers too, sent
like children to kill children for the piece of land
my horse now freely salutes with excrement.
Myself, it's my fate to be a leader, to take a hand
in this nasty task of clearing the land. The winds
have settled now. In a few, short hours the Braves
will return to this, their sacred home. For some seconds
before the scrambling, begging and slaughtering begins,
before the children drop their sticks and cloth boats,
by surprise, into the water, this crime has no flaw.
Even the silence has blessed the death of these Pequots.
Raising our torches, these crosses made from straw,
I give the signal to move forward. In this sun the luster
of our armour spills over our breasts like water.