

Smoke Signals

If I capture the grief
of an olive farmer,
Israeli bulldozer destroying
 an ancient grove
and place this beside your heart,
is there any way
for it to continue beating?

If I record the scream
of an African mother,
daughter and son carried off
 by slavers,
and command it to visit you
in the middle of your night,
can you imagine sleep offering
its companionship ever again?

If I show you the flash
of Japanese children incinerated
 in a single instant
two August days in 1945,
fasten this behind your eyes
how could they bear to look
upon the world from that moment?

If I comprehend the rage
of an Indian warrior:
village of smoldering teepees—
 of corpses and of blood—
seer this vision into your memory
as if you and I were there too,
since we both were
 (and still are),
what life force might then drive you
 from that moment
other than the cry for vengeance?

Yet still our hearts beat.
We sleep when sleep allows,
open eyes enough to see the world
 (or perhaps not),
even manage, despite everything,
 to make love

from time to time.
because the human spirit
returns to us after each trauma
no matter how often,
no matter how unimaginable,
offering a possibility
of redemption—yes,
perhaps even for a nation
as often cursed as yours
and mine.

Still, I have been told,
the smart money
is on vengeance.

Steve Bloom
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