

Your Country

'Tis of thee I sing, land
of pilgrim's proud mythology, Ellis-Island
fairy tale of welcome-mat for all.

Overturn a stone or three
on which your palace has been built.
and I'll show you ancestral skulls,
cracked and broken—if not
ground, while still alive, into a dust
so fine that no forensic anthropologist
can name your victims now.

My grandmother was born millennia
before your human sea arrived, thrived
in harmony with the forests,
meadows, hillsides until one day
soldiers set her teepee blazing.

Grandfather did not enter through
a golden door, was flushed instead
from the putrid bowels of a ship—one
link in the slave-chain which still
binds your world together, although
you find this hard to comprehend.

My mother, lured from Asia
with the promise of employment, was
undressed when she arrived, locked up
in a room, kept for your enjoyment—
until, bored one day, you sliced
what was left into tiny pieces, tossed
them away, imported my sister.

It was darkness, not your lady's lamp,
that guided my father from lands
where human beings deemed to be of the wrong kind
are born, so he might cower for more
than one lifetime in your fields and orchards.

My aunts and uncles appealed to you, but
were sent back to the death camps and, when
a few returned after the war, emaciated,
pleading now, you dispatched them again
to make your fight with the Arabs their fight
with the Arabs, proving thus that the Hebrew race
could learn the art of killing well enough to be
accepted into your polite society.

My cousins, nieces, nephews, children,
still enter by stealth, or not, work
wherever you choose to avert your eyes:
sewing clothes for you, harvesting
and preparing food for you, making sure
you do not choke on your own excrement—and so,
“from sea to shining sea,” people deemed to be
of the right kind can spend time humming favorite tunes
of liberty and justice for the favored few—one nation,
under whatever god might be deranged enough
to bless this America.

Meanwhile I will wait until, one day,
the angry eyes emerge from every
fruited plain and mountainside,
compelling you to look, for once—I mean
really, really look (for once)—at your nation’s
contributions to the world. And if you are
in luck on this particular day they will
be extracting merely dreadful retributions.

No, do not glance over your shoulder. Watch
the face in the mirror, because, “ ’tis of thee,
of thee I sing.”

Steve Bloom
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