

**Grandmother's Text:
A poem by Judy Belsky**

The first time I cross an ocean
I am an onion
My grandmother hides me in the hold of the ship
She combs wayward ends of silk
tucks my tender skin
in velvet folds
She inverts me roots first
She smoothes protective membranes
around the cell
where the code to my identity is stored
To the rhythm of surf
she sings a lullaby
Somos Judios/we are Jews
Her face is a map
engraved with longitudes of exile
Gravity pulls her back
Wind pushes her forward
She hovers in the air
over two small graves
shaded by willow branch
She leans over me while I sleep
She teaches me the circular dialect of her arms
Small sentries

**Passover Scarf:
A poem by Judy Belsky**

**my father wraps the matza in it
I place it on my shoulder
to rehearse the weight
of freedom
smooth against my cheek
fragrant with my mother's perfume
my father's chant**
*we are slaves in the land of Egypt
and they afflict us
and we cry to the G-d of our Fathers
and the Holy One blessed be He
redeems us from their hands*
over rise
and fall
I dream back
four centuries
my father
is a physician
in the court of the king
at night he dips his feather
into rich blue ink
I read honor and wealth
I hear prayer *images of silver and gold
have ears but do not hear*
I read chaos and betrayal
I hear prayer *do not trust in princes*
I read torture and death
I hear prayer *straits of the grave seize me*
I hear an offer to become Christian
we abandon our homes
the church takes our wealth
*in my flight I cry
mankind is false*
we leave by boat
in dying light
my father says
water is ink
write an ocean
as long as your eye can see

guard a citadel
The steps in her dance
move away
move away another way home
She leans over me while I sleep
to enter my dreams
Somos Judios
Through her skin
I smell the aromatic earth
wild roses in her garden
She is happier on land
The ocean erodes memories
with no embankment to settle against
On a road she can leave markers
encode footprints in the earth
When the Jews leave Egypt
there is a road
even where there had been a sea
She scatters breadcrumbs in the air
a gull catches them in his beak
He soars higher on the blessing in her dough
On deck my grandfather
stands beneath the moon
His evening prayers glint like silver seeds

prayer
as long as two arcs reach
home
anywhere
you find
His voice
upon the water

in the dark loam of the ocean

Kavana moves constellations

The captain keeps tacking tacking to compensate

On the final dawn

across a porous horizon

trees begin to name themselves

The customs official asks my grandmother

what is that wrapped in velvet?

This?

Nada

Just paper

I dissolve into paper

For twenty years I am her text

stained with her breath

the secret of her intentions

the leitmotif of her prayer

her sacred architecture

bone white arches

light slips past

memory of the Temple

blue, purple and scarlet silks

fine twined linen

patterns for embroidery

the necessity of beauty

remedies for healing

her bone chant over the dead

how to wash away sin

and leave innocence swathed in white

the rhythm of birth

the quickening of anticipation

written over the history of terror

the history of wandering

What to leave

What to take

How to ease yourself from a landscape

boundaries intact

How to ease your thoughts away from one
language

And into another

With no loss of divekut

How to embed an urgent message

Under your tongue

Somos Judios

Holy texts written in flight

inscribed in parchment

the rise and fall of her cursive

in spaces between births

snatches of psalms

u le Zion yaomer/and of Zion who w il l say

ish v ish ulad bah

For each one born in Jerusalem

another longs for her

Snatches of psalms

like bits of conversation

between volumes of Talmud

I sleep for twenty years

I awaken as a girl