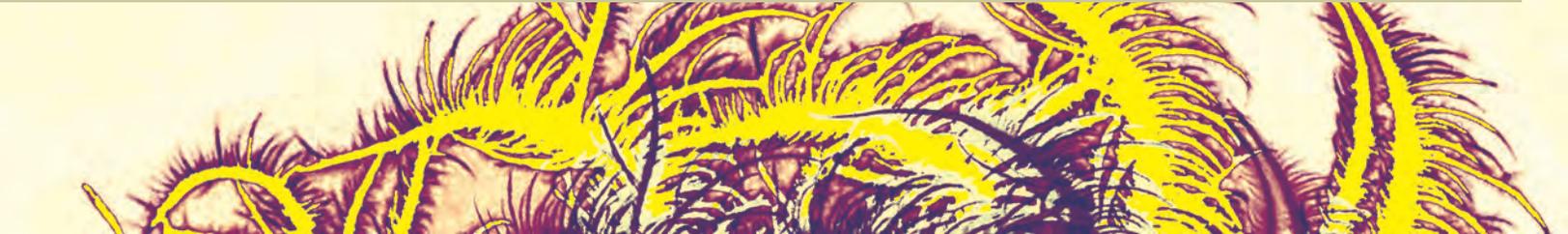


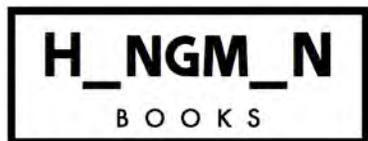
PRECIOUS COAST

LEORA FRIDMAN



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Cover by Anna Pollock-Nelson

for Wendy and Nick

*Blessed are you, Hashem, our G-d, spirit of the universe,
who formed people with wisdom and created within us
many openings and many hollows. It is obvious and known
before you that if but one of them were to be ruptured or if
one of them were to be blocked it would be impossible to
survive and to stand before you - even for a short period of time.*

- "Asher Yatzar," Talmud Berachot 60b

BEDEW

Formerly battered and regularly held, I'm alone in the way this place rockets. I can tell a beef jerky from some waterproof meat. It's the way the outside coats it. Protein shoots me out into the world like a home-birth, smug in all it can moisten itself. What's all this casing on my springy skin? You're at risk for being gropeless. I know touch as instinctual hornet, as frizzy sleeping warrior, as reluctant defender of vibrating cells. I have boring barbecues. I can keep shouting fungi names off my roof into a night packed with blackness only because I don't understand the density of meat. Greasy but formative, I teach missiles to cast unprocessed spells. I write back when militants send me letters. It's the resilience that douses my need.

FOR FEARFUL FACTIONS

a good joke is calling
my friend up & saying
I have not found
any skin yet but I will
be around soon, just as
soon as I can fight off
the beavers peeling fibers
from my scalp, trying
to open my mind,
making me feel far
more awake than
I ever intended to find
myself, laughing at
how much human I am,
how pressed I am to this
place: this is what I
intended to tell when
I crept so easy upon
a new environment & crept
so carefully by new people's
heads, because this is no
tailored estrangement, this is
the speech we have bred

THERE WERE LESS DUDS LEFT TO WRANGLE

from the perspective of this heart
peering out from the Boston Harbor
into an accidental picnic one kid made
for the scientists, he said looping
back around to watch the birds sniff
for the big Me's, he already had
more knowledge about the future
than me & the Mars Rover combined,
he already had an accurate filter
with which to announce his fate
to the millions who didn't know him
but would finally watch him lead,
acting as the best human muse
on record, an inspiration for how
much hollowness to believe,
& he would pass me below him
measuring out my lunch intake
watching more tamed water receive us
delivering none of my own wake
& instantly I would grow grateful
the way grateful is just invented sound
& I could watch millions adore us
if only for dried water beds we found

IT IS THE WEEKEND

abroad now, where my day
was never intended to be relaxed,

when working hard was rewarded,
when I wanted to hold less hands,

when one more heart of darkness
mentioned on the radio didn't sound

as mindless as every other time, so
I am committed to floundering soundly

with so many feet on the ground
that you can think me cautious

or you can think me stress-free
but I will still be trying for

more that is final, more that
really wrecks the dreams of

our largest leaders, who had
visitations to attend with leaders

religious, idle and otherwise,
who flubbed by breaking even

in the competition of who doesn't
make requests, in another contest

for our country in which I made
demands no one found germane

to the needs we were having,
I mean each suitable suit stuck

to my body, unfunny but still
walking and I dove preciously,

I spoke preciously, I broke
the work week once and for all

when I found it most effectively enchanting
to declare this stance defeat

THEY SAY GIVE UP

the last way you tried
to know us, and come play
dire by the sea: in this game
every human must allow in
another and the ocean,
must welcome all waters
that found this an occasion
to visit the sand, the sand
that has been moved
splendidly by storm
from one file to the next, the sand
that would make any mother say
can you select a career now,
not by virtue of not seeing
but by virtue of more moves
away from cities
and into the traffic of daylight
and into the traffic of a town
in which nothing can be crushed
under something else
just bends again to softness
because this is all so *dire*
that water remains unsaid
that pebbles remain deliberate
and everyone is so widespread
that now when we actually see us
it's an occasion for tides to run
to wrap *urgent* around our fingers
and talk so little under the sun

I AM READY TO TELL YOU

that I have recycled

the calling

I thought

I always had

more communications

came driving

through the rain

to call me theirs

this was one way to have a family

this was another way to decant

one trial into the next starter

how to speak exquisitely more

when experiment levels out working

cleanses my uncertain spore

just you try pulling last week

into more hymns about present day

this is not the way we preserve us or

the precious coast we could restore

THE BEACH DAY ROBE

don't bite that, mom, said the boy
in the way of walking to salt

the salt we all have
when we've gone months

with no children ticking
around us or in us or

in spite of every sun
we have collected ease here

an orientation we like
a side for pictures in profile
that displays our second sea

the one where we are attired
easily in fabrics we know
& have known for centuries

as our families traipsed
before needing permits
before needing to park

towards the sands filled so healthy
with biting sandflies

who would clamp onto our rest
who would leave all gulls for dead

& say all along that they wanted
only to know about roles

& who wears what to a beach town
& who carries how many steaks

when they mean to grill
all the children's talking

in one fire to unite their lots
into one trek that isn't for leaving,

but for seeing
what distress we forgot

AT LEAST THERE ARE WINDMILLS ASLEEP ON THE SEA

so they make a split
between sand and safety
a grumbling omitted

more questions that win
by yelling
that they are not calming down

so they power us up by virtue
of pumping under a cloud

a division between spinning
and what spinning has to pound

when a large head of state is chatting
we go play basketball by the store

where I have found many objects replacing
other objects I truly need

between making bread and more floating
over what I cannot eat

and no one demands he goes fishing
since his vacation inspecting mills

and the leader of the free world is missing
because tuna is always well-stocked

finding every productive stance here
from whence you can number the fish

he likes to watch us churning
so sufficient in our sails

always converting more blueness
into more horizontal lots

he likes to play us his saxophone
and sinking away from us all

I want him to talk for full minutes
but spend my time pressed to the wall

as energy sources acquaint us
with who could take a spill

as energy sources flail daily
pumping adequate and shrill

IN MY KITCHEN AT NIGHT WHEN I SEE EVERYTHING

There are no bodies of water to delight But
every other person in this town has liquid &
we are lying mostly by one another's sides
Between which walls get cranky But continue
to descend So we have more beer to be spacious
which doesn't keep our bellies still & doesn't
keep us from petting down our skin We want
untouched mostly Or we want touching when
it isn't concrete To be a sinner sweating out sin
To be a person who can abstract What holds in
flooding Behold what isn't touching is release
Behold the despair I have ridden over heat
to find you here In my kitchen at night when
I am seeing Every damn delivered to my ear

I CAME HERE TO FEEL GOOD

like no one was hoping
to hear

when my tribe left
they were all happy

when they returned to earth
they were sighing again

on their way they saw footage,
on their way they watched the debate

this is one trial
I am troubled to remember,

the snarl
I want to hear:

what balances action
fast fun

with driving too much;
to experiment with a family;

to deliver more
earth to itself;

to make the ground flatter
or was it more hilly that was right

I say *animal* but mean
nothing noble

on the tree-lined streets
I am not full

I am not suggesting
strategy mapping

with this fun we're repairing
so many game plans

THERE, THAT WAS SKY

in the electric way
sky can fail
to delight me

when I watch
for what
sky is not,

(also known as phoning
to chat with all creation)

or watch for
what sky is

through apps
that deliver
constellations

which we say
the forms make,

(also known as talking
with stars we cannot spot)

I watch a feeling
empty, grow opaque,

a feeling that told us
history was battles
in clear sky,

(also known
as the discipline of pointing
to surpass the naked eye)

so many years ago
when they, too,
had devices

and, too, denied
we are alone
with our forms,

hunted for what bodies
are our peers here

and wondered less
how much the future

might not care
for our fate,

but would build more
sky over it,

make another
shroud

for all we did not know
about setting our own forms
in light

as explorers
of an ancient deep,
the sky
our only our village

crying to know
which baby would lead us

which figure would crawl
headlong into wisdom

or into silhouettes
that could absolve us

from only being
mistaken,

because future enactors
would know

this schema
was a building,

that looking back
would hold,

and when we felt so famous
stepping up to fact, to guess

what bodies
were which bodies,

we'd know our guesses
would be missing,

would be found
by looking
through a phone

MY DISPERSING SORRY

my new pledge is stating
tonight will be the night

we will matter without asking
animals to model any faces

that emotion conveys, any fuel we need:
today goodbyes are gas station buzz,

used up like coaxing, which turns me
off slowly as if I am unavailable

but available for freight,
thinking now of how likely more people

are to find me exciting when I am not
dumped with light, when large flat forces

are denying me something more significant
than steak, when judging by your face

I am no middle America,
no quietly crucial selection

that remains to be made
between what I can't be sure needs me,

just a flatlands,
an optimized place,

not calling for a vision,
or sound that relates,

and every atmosphere flying over
can look down on us again

it can look down on us
on our deck of noise

it can look down on us sunning
so promising from above

it can look down on us guaranteeing

as it disperses one more pledge

ALL THIS AWAKING

Once I understand
what's singing

the birds can
rename my peace

some overpass
will also hear

on this street
singing multiple missions

just like any mystic
wakes up to someone's will

I will hear
each singer broadened

I will respond
so highway

in the morning
within my means

so I can afford
to care here:

an overpass is an opera
a person is an opera alive

all this awaking
is learning how to thrive

SO I SUGGEST SANDWICHES

In each lasting jiffy is an
action I feel through, a way
to delight those lively, frank
ladies who collapse along
the banks of the river I have
newly come to know. We
are moving: So I suggest
sandwiches, hoping we can
move a few steps away from
ecstasy & fainting & a delight
in the liver itself. These
women require me because
they have such fibrous deadlines.
More women are inclined to
stories about falling than are
inclined to enjoy a crunch.
We live around rubber today.
This is the way sound operates
on this scale: there is always
a muffling sand. Grow small,
indict yourself, & less will
assemble. Less will be tough.
We are glad here, in the way
falling has to be glad. So I
suggest you find us walking,
you find us a common law
to flop along, you find us
an unveiled picnic where
no one else can stand.

IF DISCOMFITED

Dear Wendy, what
makes the morning such
a quiet sell? I dreamt
an older woman had cancer
all through her bones,
so I sat her down
with my own mother
in an airport gate. I thought
we could all read novels
and know. They laughed, and
there were tropical destinations
outside. Pages fluttered
so shining. My mother was
so light. Into the small air
I let an action shrink.
Into the giant rectangle
that is lying, I fake
happiness for what else
I could win. Tell me, Wendy,
when you buy it does
the light leave you?
Do you get glossy shame?
They talked loudly and
were never embarrassed by
the crinkling. Still new
to one another, they developed
an unfamiliar rapport. I knew
them less. In the current events
they whistled through there
was also attire. I saw planes
and thought, still: I have more
questions to wish for. I have
no other fight.

THE DEBATE HAPPENED ON A SOFA,

quiet enough. Every other person had gone to bed long before the quiet had come. The two of them had long been arriving at this debate. One was still alive. When one rose from a chair to strike the other, neither were surprised. They were long-suffering victims, both. They knew how to protect & swing wide. This could be strategy, also. One warned the other what the blood was for, & the other tried to appear un-impressed. No one cried anywhere in the house. One pressed the other close & smelled a loose shock of well-washed skin. No one could say they were children. No one could relieve their eyes from that light. Neither was getting the audience they wanted, so I rose from my bed to hush them, & we all still felt we were right.

SKITTISH SEASONAL MEAL

Evening becomes
a sort of penance
when we hand
our smoke rings up,
make widening
and symmetric
the animals
we've speared,
and scratch off
strips of forearm
skins we seared earlier
on purpose.

Low lit,
proofs come early
in the morning and slide
toward the dark.

Co-eaters try on
costumes that glitter
or make fake babies
appear in their stomachs.

I'm losing
the desire
to barbecue
or to mother
something so large.

THIS IS OUR ONLY WEDDING

in which your hand will tell me
what makes a search lawful

when finding is striving
when buying abounds

I wouldn't want my children
to be the children

thawing out a box
of trial-sized protection,

moving at each other gladly
if only for the shock

I wouldn't want them on this planet
if only to restock:

our history matches
the tasks we're living

the ones we throw together
just to undergo

I can see us meeting always
but you indicate so slow

I would follow procedures
for any burning task, just

signal you want me producing
signal you want me aglow

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