

PATRICIA ALFORD

Lot's Wife

Her daughters are way up ahead.
Lot is sprinting from boulder to boulder.
Mrs Lot's bundles are heavy.
Why isn't Lot carrying anything?
God will provide, God will provide.
Why aren't his feet even touching the stone?
Why are his sandals not the slightest bit worn?
Why are his robes so white?
Why is he leaping from rock to rock?
Why is his heart that light?
Why is he dangling, in fact, from strings?

The girls are miles ahead.
Covering the ground like gazelles.
Why is she here, glued to the ground?
Her bones, brick dust.
Her skin, dried mud.

It's not reluctance to leave.
The cities of the plain were never her home.
Brought from her mother's hill tribe
at the age of twelve
to this man in front of her
who doesn't look back
and doesn't offer to help with the bags.
I know, I know, *God will provide.*

She might as well put them down.
 Lot is flying low over the great red boulders
 while she must climb down one side
 and up the other, hoisting her possessions along
 and—let's not forget—Lot's possessions too.
 And the girls. Who are nowhere to be seen.

Lot's wife can smell the cities burning.
 The wind blows the smoke her way.
 She covers her face with her shawl,
 her burning eyes fill with tears.
 Now she can't see Lot at all.

Certainly he has left no footprints
 to follow in this hard rock.
 Lot's wife heaves the bundles up onto a ledge
 and clammers after them onto a plateau.
 She should be able to see Lot from here.
 A curtain of falling ash obscures everything.
 The angel is gone too.
 Don't look back, he said.

Lot's wife rests
 her back against a pillar of white stone.
 She wonders how the hens are.
 The chicks hiding under their mother's skirts.
 She imagines the peach tree in the courtyard.
 Its leaves curl up, turn brown and crumble.

A gust of wind tears a rip in the pall.
 Through the gap, Lot's wife can see
 a pass in the mountains,
 and just beyond, the green hills
 of her mother's people.
 Heading toward the tents and the cooking fires
 of her sisters and aunts,
 she leaves the bundles
 at the base of the salt pillar.