

DAN MACISAAC

Two Poems

1. Lot's Wife

*But the wife of Lot looked back, and she
became a pillar of salt.*

Genesis 19

East of Sodom she hesitates and looks back.
Though warned by the messenger again
and yet again, she dares, preferring
the spend-thrift past to the tight-fisted future.
She, like her nation, has a history.
And her memories are near and generous.
Call Sodom her Eden; and she already
misses the gardens of the twin city—
the tall scented trees with crescent shadows,
blackbirds flitting from the highest boughs,
the chirr of insects hidden in the rushes,
and petals swirling on those dark eddies—
Gomorrah by the river. It was a good life
with two daughters obedient as lambs,
quiet meals at the common table,
long barter in the market over
unspoiled fruit, and light quick gossip over
low walls with respectable neighbours.
She was happy with Lot who never raged.
Her man kept no other wives nor concubines,
never raising a finger to touch her slave
who turned the handmill at dawn without complaint
and swept the house floor clean as a temple.

But all that is past like debris in the river.
 Slowly, she turns and her eyes catch fire
 from the avenging angel at the far gates.
 Blasted by light, her blood thickens, clots.
 She becomes her own tombstone of perfect salt.

2. The Wife of Lot

Like a god, like a slave,
 I am not named in the chronicle
 which says I looked back to my peril,
 in defiance of my Lord God and husband.
 I did look back but not to my death.
 Too well I remembered my life in Sodom.
 Weak-kneed, sodden Lot,
 toady to the law of hospitality,
 offered up his two virgin daughters
 to the ravenous mob.
 Soused in raw palm wine, my husband
 did not notice the two sisters' silence.
 The Sodomites howled at our door,
 too familiar with our daughters'
 coos and cries by dark and by day.
 That rabble wanted fresh flesh,
 untouched by human hands.
 I did not comfort my children
 when they wailed long and hard,
 scorned, spurned by that fickle crowd.
 My life had been bondage,
 pinned down by the sniping of gossips,
 trapped behind brick walls
 with two straying daughters,
 and a sullen handmaid from Canaan
 who refused to wash herself or our linens
 and who lived only to mince
 through the marketplace for a wink,
 a squeeze or a warm moist coin.
 I had no choice. On the road from Sodom,
 I looked back in relief, then ducked

and scuttled southward to Egypt,
losing Lot among the weird pillars
of stone and salt that haunt
the distant end of the Dead Sea.
Let them all talk. Let my myth continue.