

A Woman of Salt Near the Dead Sea

by [Margaret Mackinnon](#) in the [March 2024](#) issue

I have seen the pillar of salt, and it remains to this day.

—Flavius Josephus, first century CE

How did they speak of her, this woman
they had known? Lot's wife turned to salt,
to stone. Perhaps her own family

covered her in shame. Nameless now,
the one undone—
though later there were those who judged,

seeing in the land itself traces
of her reckoning: a sea so bitter that *fish*
are nowhere to be found in it—

as if order failed there amid the arid hills,
deposits of asphalt and of pitch—
as if all of it were scorched by ancient fires.

Snatch your soul away from the world,
they said to her. *Flee from the burning!*
But she did not obey. Perhaps it was

a yearning to return, even to those small,
ordinary hours—
broken bits of discarded gods,

lost hearts, memories enough
to last a long, long time. And others
said there were two daughters left behind.

What mother wouldn't turn to see
if they were coming, too? And so,
she turned, returned—

became long witness of an instant.
And was held fast. Maybe she lifted a hand,
refusing to forget, praising all of it—

salt of sorrow, salt of sweat—
whatever had to be remembered,
whatever needed praise. Even the old

griefs held within a certain sweetness.
And some will say they see her still,
as we did, I believe—

as we passed that hot sea: those unlikely shadows,
ghostly shapes of stories almost lost,
now summoned back—

wondering what she might have thought
of them—
imagining she were here to see them now.