

Lot's Wife

BY DIANE FLACKS

Rachel hated openings and rarely went, because when she did she felt that she was expected to be dazzlingly off-beat, and there were so many people she had to say hello to and she always feared she was snubbing one to say hello to another. At openings, she felt adrift on a too-salty sea in which she could neither sink nor stand. She floated from this person to that, never finishing conversations before being carried to another. She was tempted to look back to see if she had hurt the one she left, hoping they too would be gone to some other dim eddy. But looking back could disturb the currents and send her whirlpooling to somewhere even worse. She thought of Lot's wife, who for looking back to see God's great destructive pillar of fire destroying her home town of Sodom, was turned herself into a pillar of salt. Lot's unnamed wife's two daughters, also unnamed, following closely behind their mother, walked right into the bitter pillar, sustaining sharp indentations on both their barely still-virginal foreheads, that later, in a cave, would be traced by their father's own drunken fingertips. Though Lot's wife was fast becoming a monument to the impractical result of tearful nostalgia, Lot himself walked on through the screaming dust of the desert, oblivious to the meltdown, proud jaw set for the future. Lot had a reason to be proud. According to the chosen one, Abraham, the father of the Jewish and Arab people, Lot was the most pious man in Sodom. Abraham vouched that Lot would so impress God, that He would be tempted to spare the notoriously unfriendly cities of Sodom and Gemorrah from His destructive glory. Lot may have been righteous, but to Rachel's reckoning, Lot was also a delusional control-freak, who would rather give his two young daughters to an oversexed mob looking for something to stick their unwashed biblical dicks into, than turn over some smooth-skinned angels he had just met that morning, who were taking refuge in his two-bedroom townhouse. The angels were sent by God in response to Abraham's assertions, in order to test Lot and the Sodomites's ability to welcome outsiders. However, the angels' skin was so sumptuously smooth, it caused a riot in the quietly banal, evil suburb of Sodom where Lot lived surrounded by his women. Never had the short, gnarly, toothless, polyp-encrusted people of Sodom and Gemorrah seen skin of such honey coated velvet as adorned the languid lithe skeletons of the two beardless angels with the huge amber eyes. How could men grow so tall!? And how could they have no wrinkles on their faces, no calluses

on their hands, no dirt on their feet? What did they do all day? They were marble, these strange angel men; milk, lava. They moved without exerting any muscular energy. They glowed with a benevolent innocence that emanated from their disturbing amber eyes. The eyes smiled devastating naivete. The lips shone with bemused ironic knowledge. The cheeks relaxed over unclenched jaws with a breathtaking gentleness.

So of course, the sand-ugly dwellers of Sodom wanted to fuck them. Fuck them and then take them apart to see how they worked. Lot was always a sucker for the underdog, and being a pious and cowardly man, he decided the way to diffuse the mob that gathered howling at his back balcony was, in true biblical fashion, to offer his own children for sacrifice. His two daughters were still virgins, and therefore worth a pretty penny. He speculated that the mob, made up, as it is written, of all the men of Sodom from boy to elder, would be so busy 'knowing' his girls that they would let the angels escape, and presumably Lot would escape unknown as well. But the angels themselves stepped in. After all, they were sent from the same God who had asked Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac and who then saved Isaac at the last second as Abraham's knife hung poised to stick his uncircumcised son like a pig. The God who sent the golden skinned angels doesn't really want fathers to actually kill their children all for the love of Him. He just wants them to prove that if He asked, they would. Oddly, God never asked the mothers. So, maybe Lot, having been created in God's image, knew God would intervene to save his pre-pubescent girls from gang rape by hundreds of angel-frenzied citizens, and he was just offering them as a gesture. Maybe not. As the mob gathered steam, Lot and his family were informed by the beautiful angels, who naturally spoke in exquisite three part harmony even though they were only two, that their city was about to be burned to the ground. Not because the Sodomites may or may not have been willing to engage in homosexual acts with the beautiful angels (how could they resist?). And not because they were willing to engage in pedophilia

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with Lot's daughters. No, the angels were sent to destroy Sodom and Gemorrah because save for the dubious Lot, there was not another righteous man there, and because the inhabitants were not very nice to strangers. The angels sung-spoke Lot's family's escape route from the megacity of Sodom and Gemorrah with such purity that all present wept in rapture. The angels, thus assured of their powerful place in mythology as bringers of loveliness and doom, ordered Lot *et al.* not to look behind them. The angels' amber eyes never left Lot's wife's as they admonished Lot to look forward, lest he see the skin melting, the animals running wild with flames suckling at their underbellies. Lot's wife, not accustomed to being spoken to, and certainly not by name, since she didn't seem to have one, became overwhelmed with a curiosity and accountability she had never before felt. She became obsessed with looking back. In order to get it out of her system, she kept peering over her shoulder as the family packed their few portable things, causing her daughters to almost lose themselves in a frenzy of double-checking.

But Lot's wife did not get it out of her system. She could not stop looking back—to her short childhood, to her mother—whose name she had forgotten, to her wedding night, to this morning at the market where she heard tell of strange floating men so beautiful you wanted to kill them. That morning she picked fat flies off of prickly desert pears and felt the first thought form in her mind in three years:

Oh for those beautiful men to feel the dread I have felt each day as I walk to market aware that I am being watched by the eyes of the men of Sodom, from boy to old man, watched, as a cow to slaughter, as a ripe fruit before biting. Let them be smiled at with menace, let them feel bound by ropes of weakness, let them struggle, long after they are no longer beautiful, struggle silently for a name.

So when the mob came, Lot's wife understood why they wanted to deflower and kill the angels. She understood their hatred of the beautiful unavailable weak ones, because she felt it herself. In Sodom and Gemorrah, as in much of the world (and in the theatre tonight, thought Rachel) it was human nature to want to crush the lovely small vulnerable lights of the world, the baby chicks, kittens, and unnamed daughters. Though Lot's wife thought these thoughts, she did not speak up. She did not speak up even when her own daughters were offered to the hordes by her righteous husband. Is that why the singing angels turned their unblinking amber eyes on her? Is that why they doomed her to salt?

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ELISAVIETTA RITCHIE

Magdalena's Journal

1.
We might have a storm, or war,
by afternoon so, checking our supply
of candles, canned food, cabbages and bread,

(nothing left to buy),
we shut the windows, lock the door,
put another blanket on the bed.

2.
We must leave the country
and somehow get his aunt out.
We can't let her go home.

We have our passports. She
needs her documents forged.
She is old, but well-known:

They still photograph her eerie eyes,
strong jaw, long straight hair now gray,
the navy beret she always wears.

We sketch her disguise—
shall we pad her into a portly man,
or a nondescript crone, dye her hair?

We cannot plan aloud:
the children are young,
might not keep our secrets.

At home we only discuss
schoolwork or dinner. Neighbours
eavesdrop, others keep watch.

The children point out a new device—
camera or telescope—on the roof
across from our flat.

They don't ask if there's also
a rifle, but may understand
why we avoid the balcony now.

Even the cat stays indoors.
We whisper: "Tonight."
In the back room, his aunt