

Salt

The woman bent and pleased herself, unabashed in her nakedness, her fingers playing between her legs as her bare feet sank into the wet ground. Toes curled, eyes closed, mouth upturned in a quiet smile, lost in the ecstasy of her own body.

I stood beneath her, transfixed. A child still, I stood on the sloping bank, between sun and shadow, the creek below refracting rays of light.

Sweat dripped down my forehead, into my eyes. I could not stop looking. Sweat burned my eyes. And after, a crust of salt.

What did Lot's wife see when she turned back?

An outline of sky, or the arch of a toe? The curve of a breast, falling toward earth? Dark hair grazing ground, soft dirt.

Did it fill her with regret? Or longing?

The woman's hand moved faster between her legs. Mouth in the shape of an 'o.' Sweat in the grooves of her body, backlit by the sun.

Salt and ash. Don't open your eyes. Don't look. Don't want.

She opened her eyes, saw me watching, and startled, staring back at me.

Against the sky, her body, in silhouette. The curve of her neck.

I hadn't known that woman could be another name for desire.

I thought about the blueberries we had picked earlier that day, her and I and the others. Where had they gone? It seemed lifetimes ago.

I recalled the suppleness of their purple flesh between my fingertips, turning them over—sweet juice, bitter skin. Hands stained with crimson, burning in the cuts that adorned my palms.

My cheeks flamed as I watched her watching me.

Later, I would remember the expression on her face as she gazed at me from between her legs, a question without an answer.

Her surprise at being caught this way. And my shame at being seen, at having witnessed, without intending to, this private moment, as if I had intruded on someone kneeling in prayer.

I wanted to kneel. I wanted to pray. I wanted to lick the sweat from her skin, to be absolved.

I wanted something I could not name.

I was afraid. I was alive.