

“Helen or Soula” excerpts

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HELEN

Haven't slept in a year
I go to bed, ready to fall asleep
suddenly I twitch all over
Little electric shocks
therapeutic and deadly
until the sun comes up
behind the hills

No birds fly at that hour
They made a pact with the trees around my house
No birds but one
a mocking one
Every day
at the exact same hour
a red jay
screeches like a cat
just as the sun comes up

I don't know where I am, I guess
This is not my home, or is it
They brought me back here a slave
in chains
fur, lace
strapped to the mast
in a bed
underground
I stand among men
washed, in white
with open heart and mouth

I can't breathe
and you tell me to
Smile so I can see your chalky teeth
You
and the Other one
A teeth fetish

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Helen is the name they gave me
But say I was called Soula
Soula the hairdresser from Kokkinoplos
The little village on the edge of Olympus
Soula the Goddess of Highlights
who left her parents' village
to study at a beauty school in Larissa
the fourth largest town in Greece,
known for its large flat plains
and found her true love
a wealthy farmer with two Mercedes
and land as far as the eye could see

They met at a fair
And fell in love at the back seat of a car

But she was a lady, from then on
A 2000 people wedding
Bishops, ministers, colonels,
champagne, whiskey and ouzo
the clarinet playing folk songs
over and over
and Soula was sparkling
Every now and then the couple went
vacations in France, Italy, Russia
Five-star spas
Gourmet restaurants
and whenever she wanted
Greek dance bars
smashing plates
and throwing flowers
at the hottest singers

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Soula, much better
A widow at twenty five
but childless
(the deceased was shooting blanks)
with the two Mercedes all mine
and land as far as the eye could see

Along came the suitors, the beaus
for stunning Soula

Roses
Orchids
Ferrero Rocher

Bowing to her pedicure
Promising marriage
But she just curls her hair

Roller, pin
Roller, pin
Roller, pin

Strutting around Larissa, aloof
Turning the heads of men
just to get a glimpse
of the most eligible widow in town
as her breasts go up and down
up and down
Swaggering Soula
vaguely smiling
tossing her rich, well-groomed hair
outside Piccadilly Café downtown

No one takes me to a café.
Nor a tavern.
I'm expected to cook
but when I do
they always find something wrong with it
What's wrong with a single hair in your food?
Eat it and shut up.

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Not even my husband makes love to me
Not that I care
Some goddess ripped the pleasure out of me
Years ago
Do you like it, Helen
I find it fantastic, exquisite
I've never felt like this
You're like a miracle, please don't stop
Let the whole world know
That you're the best

And you
And you
And you

I think my husband has a mistress
One of those who throw stones
To double the pleasure
Take that, baby

Love is hiding behind the trees
With carved initials

Knife
Blade
Nail

Wash your dirty hands
(before you touch me)
(before you serve the food)

Haven't eaten in three days
Not that anyone noticed
I don't even wash my hair anymore
No one touches it
I don't count

Four
Five
Six
Light

The jay again today will make her journey
From hell to the tree outside my room
as if she is the spirit of a dead man
screeching in its language: Death

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All right, it won't be long now
I've set the table
Made a salad
Rocket and spinach
Baked potatoes
Meat balls

And cheese pie for tomorrow
For people
who will come, as if sad
to pay their last respects

You'd better not bring your mistress in the house
I'll smell her
Sweat and cheap soap
By God
I will haunt you
Don't know how, but I will
Life doesn't stop here
Unfortunately
We are reborn as farce
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