

Origins

Helena Mahdessian

I was born on the Mediterranean coast
to parents that spoke Languages.

Using their Languages, they de-
cided to clothe me with a name

that Babushka already wore
humbly and with a smile,

but Nadyezhda turned into Fa-
dyezhdada on the birth certificate so

Dad decided on second-best,
with even a letter change from Y-

elena to H-elena (only a matter of
personal taste and not culture ad-

aptation). Even so, the Rus-
sian to Greek opened up

comments and origin stories made
by everyone else and not me.

Me, I was on the receiving end
with a slightly defensive he-

art that still soaked up their well-
intentioned Helen-of-Troy's and Helena, Montana's.

They didn't know that Y-
elena was a great-grandmother of mine

from the Ukraine whose story
I remember with sympathy

Or that I step in and out
of the bright, shining light

That claims to be the meaning
of my name and every variant it inspired.

Finally, twenty years later, I gave
a St. Helena Island, exile of Napoleon

answer to a neighbor's "Do you know
what famous figure in history

you're named after?" and he was silent
while I continued to sweep the sidewalk.