

If Only Her Waist Could Belong To Her

She wears black from her waist down,
a widow for many years; she owes her dead
husband this. Starched snow-white
from her waist up, each tuck as prim
as her girlhood dreams.

She wishes she could own a gold belt,
the buckle studded with red, blue
and amber stones just like the one she had
seen a foreign lady wear walking through
the village, the thin fabric of the dress
bright as the flowers in the pots and tincans
on her front porch.

Each night she sees the belt. It is
of no help to her to think of tomorrow's
chores, the chicken-coop fence, the leaky
roof in need of repairs; or worry about her
best friend, hit the other day as she crossed
the road with the goats from the pasture, her
friend lying in the dust her
skull cracked like an egg. She prayed
at sunrise, at noon, then again at night.
Lit candles in 'Aghios Spiridoni church,
walking the seven kilometers from the village on foot.
Each night, the belt is waiting for her.

Yes, she will sell her prize hen,
she will sell the goat, the best milking
goat in the neighbourhood, Even her
*τραπεζομαυδιλο*¹ which took her three long
years to embroider. Tomorrow, she sighs
turning over in her creaky bed, tomorrow
she will sell them all and buy the belt.

Down the dusty road she sees *a coffin*
split in two, carried by eight men
Black ribbons on their left sleeves,
their eyes buried under heavy eyebrows.
Between the two halves the belt in a gold
robe and mitra is sprinkling Holy Water
with a livano branch on the road. A girl,
walking beside the first half, is smoothing
with one hand the tear-wet tucks on her
white blouse, with the other, holding on
to a white sleeve billowing from under
the lid. Beside the other half, a man
is trying to push back a black-clad foot
kicking the box open.

She must tell her friend about this
 funeral and the *παπά*² their own *παπά*,
 who had baptized them both and all
 their children and grandchildren, wearing
 a mitra studded with those red, blue
 and amber stones instead of the round black
 hat they have seen him wearing all
 their lives but her friend's nephew said,
 that his aunt is growing only trees
 now in her head.

She wears black from her waist down,
 snow-white blouses from her waist up,
 each tuck as prim as her girlhood dreams.

— *lala heine-koehen*

¹ trapezomandilo: a tablecloth (*τραπέζομάυδιλο*)

² Papa: a Greek Orthodox priest (*παπά*)