Empire Burlesque
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Helen, the Extra Special

whose face launched a thousand cruise ships—

a thousand trailer caravans
depth into the subdivided heart of the Havermeyers

and the Jaycees and the Finsters and the Prelowitz’s,
a thousand versions of the Prelowitz’s,

who took their journey from Saginaw
encamped in Yuma, Arizona, Moab, Utah—

amid chaparral, and creosote and wolf bush,
the knuckled hills and draws of,

the fanned & feathered, blasted glass of
White Sands Missile Range,

*The Red River Valley*, and

*On Top of Old Smokey*—

who ask of the ciphering wind

*When, O, when—*

She of the Golden Girls Lady Golfers,
Addresses the ball on the fourteenth tee,

in a sun hat, in a garden full of rocks—
she of the many-colored coo-coo clocks,

wind mills, wind chimes, wind socks—
who floats entire industries thereof

of table coasters and matching ashtray sets,
and clam-shell orchestras,

She, the Very Right Honorable Mrs. He
of He fame, the late he himself,
who went whole-hog on her, then died—
she who hit the trail, which ended here,
rips a shot over scorched alluvial flats,
over Bermuda grass, shaped and trimmed
like so many greening kidneys
framed by glands of bunker sand,
she whose clocks are always wound,
whose sons, scattered with the wind,
observe us from their places
with the perfect, retouched faces
of the dead—
she whose smile that always said:

Are We Having Fun Yet?
She'd really rather be in Authentic City—

authentic cowboys, authentic cats.
Authentic clowns in paper hats.

Authentic mountains, authentic lakes.
Authentic clouds, authentic fakes.

An authentic breeze luffs the sail,
parts the hair on your authentic head.

Your life you live authentically,
Your death you die, authentic, dead.

Call us now. We're standing by
Take a left at the revival tent,
then a right at the sky.
At night, from desert mountain tops
horrripilating with antennae—

with the proper alignment—
you can see the flight pattern of in-coming jets,

a terraced, ziggurat descending
from some top-most tier of atmosphere,

from St. Cloud, from Rockland,
from Chandeleur Island, from Peoria

by way of Kuybyshev and Sverdlovsk,
Phan Rang and Mindanao . . .

arriving, as it were, for the full buffet
we’ve heard so much about—

She, the cause of all this blather,
awakens from her nap, the in-flight movie over,

adjusts her seat back, tray and table,
the flight attendants cross check

and strap down as they all nose in—
the roaring, paint-blistering

ball of fire over desert palms—
(the unlikely event) is calmly shelved again,

as the swelling, signifying shadow of a plane
and the plane itself, converge, touch the earth.