Transcript: 21 Revolutions Podcast

Podcast: Helen Fitzgerald's Parts Beyond the Skies.

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**Laura Dolan:**

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**Helen Fitzgerald**

Hi my name is Helen Fitzgerald uh I'm an author I write uh adult fiction and young adult fiction I was really uh proud to be invited to do this the list of women writers who are submitting work for it is just astounding and it also makes me really proud to be living in Glasgow just when you realise how many fantastic writers there are.

"Parts Beyond the Skies"

Today I will be transported to Parts Beyond The Skies, they did something similar a couple of hundred years ago only then it was seas not skies and while the ships were quite tall and impressive they never blasted off.

The First Minister is interrupting my thoughts over the tannoy which is probably for the best as most of them are bad.

In one hour he is saying the gates of Cornton Vale Prison will shut for the last time. "We are saying no to poor conditions, no to overcrowding, no to the revolving door no to Jenny" I think and then I scold myself because I am determined to banish negative thoughts I will feel nothing but optimism and excitement I do feel excitement I've never done anything daring that's legal till now 3 years in Parts Beyond the Skies instead of at two in a cell like this only schizophrenic Mary and ILU refuse the deal bald god-loving nut job I didn't have to think twice I am a conqueror and a colonizer and an explorer and I am excited I'm practically Captain Cook or at least his wife. It'll be a proper 3 year no going back rehab. I've packed some Valium to get me through the first days when I say packed some Valium I mean I wrapped them in cling film and stuffed them you know where. The only other thing I need to take with me is the recipe my gran gave me she said she said I should learn to make good old-fashioned lentil soup for Jenny 15-year-olds don't make soup I said back then but mothers do she said glancing at my baby the soup will help you think good thoughts Gran smiled and put my hand on her hers after that she made a whole lot of noises that freaked me out dying's noisy I lost Jenny to a social worker a couple of years later but I kept the recipe book in Parts Beyond the Skies I will make lentil soup and think only good thoughts then I'll return clean as a hospital and get Jenny. Parts Beyond the Skies is the actual name although most folk call it PBS and some call it CNN but I like how oldfashioned it sounds and I say it to myself a lot I am being transported to Parts Beyond the Skies, Parts Beyond the Skies the ministers back on the Tannoy since the last announcement his voice is deeper and slower and he's found himself in an American accent "Like the boatloads of women they sent to Australia or Parts Beyond the Seas as it was known you are being sent for a reason." I know the reason and it's not to dig metal out of rocks alongside the men they have enough miners and the water and the blankets and the seeds have been sent, we are the next essential cargo nothing has changed in 200 years new lands made need men, men need women. "You are convicts who have only ever taken from society" the minister says over the loudspeaker "like the mothers of Australia you are about to give back. Your sins will be buried in the foundation of a new world you will no longer be parasites and villains but Heroes!" Heroes. Hear that Jenny? your mom's going to be a horo hero hero. "The pack being dropped through your food slot contains everything you will need the minister says if you attempt to take anything else with you the punishment imposed by the newly formed Parts government will be severe." The pack has a coded lock which I can't crack or break. It feels like it's only got two things in it a small bottle I think which rattles like pills the other object is square and solid and heavy a book full of rules I bet. "we ask no more of you than your willingness to participate" he says "you will be looked after but most of all you will be needed."

Needed? I've not been very good at that have I my baby girl? Otherwise you wouldn't have been looked after all this time. Another package drops through my food slot this time wrapped in thin plastic. "inside the plastic package you will find your suit please put this on and leave all your clothing including your underwear on the floor beside the bed." Oh dear the thoughts get worse when I'm naked the psychiatrist says that's because I was naked when they took Jenny away, not sex naked hear me I've never done that for money never will how dare you think that I'm not one of those and I wasn't one of those when they took Jenny away either no I was naked because I was in the bath I was alone I didn't mean to my head wasn't working but I'd somehow forgotten to bring Jenny back with me from the off license. "You will be collected in 10 minutes" the First Minister says "congratulations to all of you and good luck" The suit is bright yellow and baggy very unspacy I pick it up and hold it against my naked body and look in the prison issue barely reflective metal mirror ugh no one decent's going to pick me above the others if they line us up in this la la garb will they line us up? will they all look at my teeth? I check my teeth in the scratchy metal will some ex dealer from C Hall compare my teeth to the 109 other sets in line will he look at me like Jenny looked at me when I said goodbye yesterday like I'm scum I am scum no I am a needed conquering coloniser I am Captain Cook's wife yes I am calling myself "wife" and I am excited. Actually my teeth are pretty good for scum no I'm going to need that recipe they won't find it and I've become fond of punishment anyway. There I have pulled the Valium back out and the cling film is not as difficult to unwrap as I expected. I touched the brown page I tore from gran's old recipe book rough yet warm and powdery like her hand was when she gave it to me so old this recipe how many plates of soup have come from it how many excellent thoughts. one large leek the recipe reads. I will find out what a leek is and dice it so I will. I wrap the valium and the recipe in the cling film I don't like having to shove things inside me to get by but I'd better get used to it I suppose why am I thinking that way I'm not one of those I've been sentenced to transportation officially by the First Minister who is the law and it is not right or legal or possible to sentence a person to 3 years prostitution. "Don't tense up Kath" I say to myself "relax" I muster Gran's voice "hey my Kathy Kath Kath" I imagine the feel of her hand and it's back in. I put my suit on zip it up in just in time because they're unlocking my door and that's me off to be needed by the whole wide world off to get me a muscly space miner. The buses are filled with la las but not one has a smile.

Take off is at nine we arrive a week later a week later just how far beyond the skies are these parts and what skies are they talking about exactly and what are the parts parts of what and when I arrive what then I don't want to stand in a line I don't want a man with a Bar-L scar on his face to point and say "she'll do" and walk away expecting me to follow. I can feel the recipe inside me ouch it hurts but that's good because it reminds me what to think my dry mouth clicks as I open it as wide as it will go clicky click but that's good because lack of spit helps my lips lips stay put so that my teeth are on show I make my eyes smile too by thinking back to when I slept in bed beside Gran rolling over when she told me you needed my breast this isn't difficult I'll smile like this the entire flight and a Dapper guard will snap me up before we land I won't have to stand in line with the others I'll choose him I'll convince myself I said "he'll do" and walked away expecting him to follow. And the first thing I'll do when I get to my quarters in Parts Beyond the Skies Parts Beyond the Skies Parts Beyond the Skies the first thing I'll do my soft sad glorious Jenny Jen Jen.

The very first thing is make soup.

As I was going through the the box of fantastic ancient things I found a recipe book I think it was a women's Institute recipe book and what struck me looking at it and the recipes in it was how similar it was to the one my mum left for me and my sisters and uh it's such a universal thing having a recipe book that's been handed down it's old and it's tattered and it's uh it's got things in it that people have made for years and years and years and will always make like lentil soup. um the other thing I thought was I was thinking about cuz I'm Australian and reading in the library books about transportation and about uh convicts and there are a couple of stories about Glaswegian women's who who had been transported to Australia and so I had the I just was thinking at the same time that Cornton Vale was all over the news because it was overcrowded and closing down and I thought how surreal an awful a thing it would have been to be one of those women um back then who were transported to Parts Beyond the Seas it's such a bizarre thing to call the place and these women were put on a ship to go to somewhere which to them could have been Mars and it would have been even stranger probably than with the woman I'm talking about going off to uh a spaceship because the spaceship she probably knows kind of what what's inside it whereas in Australia there were weird animals and there were um you know the indigenous population and all sorts of rumours about about what happened uh and the women in those days were going off um on a boat and they were and they were going to be handed over to the men basically as prostitutes uh some of the women ended up with some of the um people on the the the captain and so forth on the ship took what they said with the "The pick of the bunch" before they arrived in Australia the other ones got there to be sort of chosen by convicts you know so I thought um I just wanted to do something to to highlight how surreal that is and uh that hence we had had this woman here in Cornton Vale going off.

**Laura Dolan**

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