



# the book of Helena

**time:** 26 CE

**place:** Alexandria, Egypt

Helena only passively kept interest in Antony, the man who had once courted her in Greece, though he kept his eye on her. Her state treated her and other women on very unequal footing with men, but she knew that her country thought she had some value, even if her value could only be through raising children or tending a home for a future husband.

Knowing she wanted to tell the world about injustices she had seen in society as she was raised in Greece, she looked forward to her chance at further education and reading through the extensive libraries in Egypt. Thinking about chances to learn in new lecture amphitheatres and study in exquisite libraries and museums, Helena was sure her future would be strong and bright, finding fascinating new people to interact with and experiencing new elements in her society for her potential new loves of life.

Her awakening was after her moving out of her parent's house to live and study. There were great libraries in Alexandria, and her friend was moving there to work and study with Helena.

Everything was going to be different for her once she got out on her own.

Haimon and Rheia, Helena's parents, worried that it was not a good idea to let Helena to move to another country and live without a man, they worried she may be thought of as a loose woman and she would not find a man to marry and would resort to prostitution. But Helena's pleas were unrelenting; they knew of the greater chances she would have by working and studying in Alexandria versus their small town in Greece, and they understood that her intelligence and strength would help her through her life, and she could always come home if things on her own did not work well quickly. They wondered how she would be able to study in libraries to learn while there; but after Helena and her future roommate relented, Helena's parents were able to pay for her half of paying for Helena and Lana's home for one year. After a tearful good-bye with her parents just after she turned eighteen, Helena left with a carriage full of belongings with her friend Lana.

Lana and Helena were close friends, but they had their differences. Lana liked different music styles and had different interests from Helena. Lana was even thrilled with watching the colosseum attacks in Greece - but Helena wasn't interested in Lana's interests and realized their differences when she was so much more interested in studying at the Library of Alexandria than Lana.

Either way, they were both happy to be on their own and were ready to celebrate their new home on their own.

Antony had worked the previous year for the State in Alexandria, and he was thrilled that Helena and Lana were moving to his city to study and work. He would live less than one mile from them; knowing they would be unfamiliar with customs and styles in their new town in this new country to them, he arrived at their home on the Sunday afternoon they arrived at their new home to help them move in.

When they first walked into the rooms where they were staying, Helena saw the area first as she carried her belongings in. As Lana and Helena scanned the space for where their belongings could go, they had to quickly decide where they would sleep and where their clothing would belong. Because of a lack of money and the difficulty in getting places to live in Alexandria, their home was one large room, so they shared the same area for sleeping, working and eating. They even just knew which side of the room each of them would sleep in - Helena liked being near where their book cases would be for her work; Lana liked being closer to spaces she can clean herself up to make herself beautiful for going out of having company over.

They knew they had more unpacking and rearranging to do of their things, but they were getting tired - and hungry - and they wanted to just take a breath and enjoy the fact that they were in their home - and in a new land - for the first time in their lives. Although they had moved most everything into their home, sunset was approaching and they had not considered food. After Antony explained to them that there are so many people from different countries in Alexandria they would not have to worry at all about learning another language to fit in, Antony then offered food and drink that he would bring to their new place a little later in the day.

The sun started to hide behind an adjacent building, so Helena pulled their candles out and placed them in lamps so they would have light for the evening. Lana grabbed one of the candles and went to a mirror to brush her hair. "Helena, you should be getting ready for Antony coming Over," Lana said.

"I'm just trying to clean up as much as we can tonight, so we can find our way through here more easily when we wake up tomorrow," Helena called back as she searched through boxes she was trying to still unpack.

"Well, he's your boyfriend, I'd think you'd want to look nice for him."

"Lana, I..." Helena tried to come up with the rest of her sentence before she finally knew what she wanted to say. "I - I'm not his girlfriend, we dated before, but we're just hanging out now."

"You still date though, right?"

"...Yes, but he's not courting me for a wife."

"You don't think. He still likes you, girl, and you could think of liking him back. He's could be a stable man for a good home for you -"

"I'll worry about making sure I'm stable first, but thanks, Lana..." Helena turned back to the stack of books to start putting them on shelves so there was less to step over in the morning. she heard Lana yelling from the other side of their home, "Why did the two of you break up anyway?"

“Lana, he moved. He’s been in Alexandria for almost a year working. He would come back to our town to visit his family, and that’s why we still saw each other occasionally. Besides, I don’t know, he may have spent time courting others and dating women since he’s moved, and it doesn’t break my heart that we’re not dating - I don’t think we were meant for each other.”

Just as Helena finished her last words, they heard a loud thumping on their door. Because Lana was near the door, Lana ran to the door and asked through the wall, “Who is it?”

She could hear a muffled voice from outside. “It’s Antony. Is that Lana?”

Lana laughed as she opened her door and saw Antony standing there with his arms filled with cloth bags for food and his fingers wrapped around a few bottles of wine and liquor. “Do you need any help carrying anything?” Lana asked as Antony made his first step toward the doorway and Helena started to walk toward the front door.

“No, I’m fine, but thanks. Where is the table so I -”

“That table is right back here, before the cooking area,” Helena said. She looked at what he brought in and asked, “Did you get all this food for us?”

“I know that cooking is done earlier in the day and you two wouldn’t have a chance to go to a market right away, so there are a lot of fruits and nuts that can keep in this bag.”

“And you brought lots of wine!” Lana said as she walked toward them after closing the door and joining them.

“One container is of water, because you won’t be able to get water until tomorrow. And the wine is drink for us to celebrate your moving tonight into your new home.”

“I’m excited ... and nervous,” Helena said. “I hope I’ll be able to leave the house enough to read or get books from the main library.”

“I see all the beautiful veils over by your beds,” Antony said. And I know a few people who work in the libraries near here, and I think you can go to the library for work and stay in a corner where you can remove your veil and read. I’ve told my friends that you’ll be moving in today, so you should be fine to read and study there. And you know, Helena,” Antony said as he reached for her hand so he could pull her toward him to embrace her, “my friends didn’t understand why you moved away to study.”

“They haven’t lives where we came from, Antony, and they must be too used to living here in Alexandria. It is amazing here.”

“But Helena, I think they thought it was strange that a woman was so interested in reading and learning instead of finding a suitor and taking care of a home.” Antony gave her a look to let her know that she would be thought of as an improper woman for wanting something more than what women are supposed to normally ever want.

“Well, if I’m supposed to be a proper girl and meet a future husband, this would be the place for me to go, no?” She said, smiling after glancing at Lana. “And where would I find a proper man? Well, libraries would hold men of intellect, so -”

Lana cut in. “You’ve come up with quite the system, Helena...”

“I had to convince my parents there was a good reason for my coming here to study, Lana...” Helena said.

“Well, you’ll have plenty of time to acclimate yourselves here,” Antony said, “and

- do you have money for food from the market? Because -"

"My parents gave us a set amount of money for this home for a year," Helena said, "but I found the place, and I know it's small, but it's much cheaper than what we had for money for this house, so we should have plenty of money for food."

Lana laughed and reached for the wine. "That's why Helena does the negotiating with money - it saved us..."

Antony cut in when he saw Lana getting the bottle of wine. "Where are any glasses for the wine? You two should be celebrating." Helena got up to get glasses and Antony saw her head looking toward one wall, So she got up to get glasses for the three of them. Antony came back with three cups and said, "I also have wine at home and I don't live far and my neighbors are going out tonight, so they might stop by with additional wine I had at my home, so we should have plenty for the evening."

"There's plenty here," Helena said, "I don't usually drink." Lana looked over at her when she said that to Antony, because Lana wanted to drink, and she wanted Antony to allow them to celebrate their new home together.

They only snacked on the fruits and nuts Antony brought them; after not eating most of the day they weren't hungry for a lot of food to fill them up. Antony kept refilling their drinks for them.

"It's a good thing my neighbors Senbi and Pamiu were going out this evening," Antony said as he finished pouring the last of his original bottles of wine into a glass for Lana. "If they didn't bring any more liquor, we'd have to call it an evening."

"But the night is young," Lana said.

Helena put on a mocking tone, saying, "Lana Kiya, what would your mother think..."

"My mother's not here," she retorted. "Are you going to be my mother now?"

Helena laughed. "Of course not. It's just fun to see you so excited to be on your own..." She thought in the back of her mind that it was strange that Antony was pushing so much liquor on Lana, but not as much on her. She eventually decided that he was probably just being nice to her because she said she didn't drink.

Helena was having a good evening, and it was nice to talk with someone other than Lana on her first night in Alexandria. Antony was there to bring food, though they didn't eat much of it that night, and he was like a servant bringing drinks for anyone who wanted it. "You know, it is usually the woman's job to cater to the group with food and drink pouring."

"I know, but I'm right here," Antony said, "and it's your first night here and you should enjoy yourselves. And you don't know how good it is to see the two of you," he said, as he moved over two feet so he could hug her. "It's nice to have people from my home town here, people I have memories with and stories from our past."

"Well, I'm glad you're here too, it's nice to have a sort of welcoming party for my arrival here."

"I wish we came earlier in the weekend," Lana said. "Then I might have places to go to celebrate our arrival."

“You have plenty of time for that,” Antony said. “Besides, now you have all week to look around and see where you’d like to go next weekend when there are more people out and about.”

Another hour or two passed, it was getting very late, and Lana looked like she was about to pass out. Helena was drunk from the evening of drinking too; she was having a hard time holding her head straight up and her speech was getting slurred. Antony finally spoke. “Lana, if you want to lay down, that’s fine,” and he turned to Helena and said more softly, “I can go home in the morning to get ready for work, so I can stay here.” He then leaned over and kissed Helena.

“Um, if you want to, you can,” Helena said, “but there’s not a lot of room here.” She looked over at their two beds, not five feet apart.

Antony glanced at Lana Passed out, still sitting at the corner of her bed. He looked back at Helena and put his arms around her. “I can find room.”

Helena had to wake Lana from her sleeping sitting position in case she wanted to get ready for sleeping on her reed mat for the night, but Lana didn’t even want to bother changing into clothes to sleep in. Lana just groaned, giggled a little when she saw that Antony was still there, and started to move her body so she could just rest there and get to sleep. When she found a blanket from one end of the mat, she dragged it up her body and turned her head to face the wall.

Turning around to walk back toward where Antony was sitting, she watched him pick up his glass of wine, then extend it out to her. “What? That’s yours,” Helena said about the drink he handed her, but Antony answered with “We still have some left to go through, and Lana won’t mind.”

“We shouldn’t wake her.”

Antony didn’t even lower his voice, because nothing woke her. “Of course not. But I don’t think she’s moving anywhere.” Antony looked over at her sleeping on the mat, and it seemed that she moved her body and the linen cloths over her so nothing would disturb her.

They talked for a few minutes; Antony then leaned over and ran his hand along the side of her face and said, “I’ve missed you,” before moving to kiss her.

“...I’ve missed you, too,” she said, though he wondered if she just appreciated there being someone she knew in this new town and new country more than missing him specifically. She didn’t know what to think, but they were there together, and Lana wasn’t waking up. She kissed him back. But Antony kept being more physical with her, and although she wanted him to go home, and although she didn’t want to disturb her new roommate, passed out only feet away from her, she didn’t think to say anything to him.

The next morning Antony was still there, and Lana still wasn’t waking up. Helena saw that he was there and knew he had to go so she curled up into a ball at the far end of the mat before waking him. “Antony, wake up. You have to go to work.”

When Antony came to and saw that it was daylight, he sprang up to get his things together. He went over to Helena to embrace her and kiss her, but she moved herself away and whispered that he shouldn't be late for his work.

His running out woke Lana, but only hearing the noises, she did not see him as he left. "Helena... how long have I been sleeping?"

"It's morning, you're fine, Lana."

"Did..." Lana looked around their home and saw they were alone, "Did Antony stay over?"

Helena knew Lana wanted Antony to have stayed over, and if he did Lana would think Antony would be obliged to marry Helena. Helena knew she did not want to be with Antony, but she feared anyone knowing what he did to her.

"Do you see him here?" she asked, hoping that would be enough of an explanation and Lana would not ask any more questions. Helena used most of what little water they had to try to scrub her skin and clean off from him, but she needed to take buckets to the nearby stream to get more water. "Oh, I'm sorry, Lana, but I used most of the water we had," Helena said. "I was going to get water before you woke up."

"We've got extra barrels," Lana replied, "so I can go with you and we can get a lot of water so we don't run out right away," she said as she moved off her mat to find walking shoes before she brushed her hair for going out. Helena and Lana got their belongings together to make the trip to get water for themselves.

As they got to the stream, there were only a few women there; Helena figures that most of the women probably already got their water from the stream earlier in the morning. Lana walked to the water with a cup and bucket, crouched down at the edge of the water and started scooping up water for the first bucket. She was working for a while because the buckets were relatively large, and she hoped that if she filled the buckets separately, Helena could walk back and forth with the water because of their weight once filled. Lana was almost finished filling the first bucket when she looked up to see where Helena was, so she could get the water and take it back to their home. In the distance, she saw Helena standing in the stream, with her knees into the water, dipping her hands repeatedly into the stream and splashing water onto her face.

Lana didn't know what she was doing; no one else was getting into the water the way Helena was, and she started to worry. "Helena," she yelled, and saw her silhouette turn to face Lana. "What are you doing?"

Helena didn't have an answer, and waited a moment before yelling back her answer. "I had to do this after our move, Lana."

Lana knew the almost full bucket of water wasn't going to move, but instead of walking over to where Helena was, she thought about switching their roles and said, "I'll bring the water back to the home if you'll stay here to fill the buckets with water. Is that okay?"

Helena knew she couldn't walk back and forth to and from the house repeatedly if she was soaking wet, so she started walking toward Lana. "Sure," she said as she got closer. "I'm sorry I got drenched like this. I can fill the water buckets if you don't mind the walking."

"That's fine, I've got this first huge bucket almost filled, so I'll just take it now. You

start filling the other ones here and I'll be back."

Lana reached down to get the large bucket filled with water for her trip back to their house. As she started to walk away, Helena took a bucket and saucer, then said, "Thanks, Lana," before starting to collect more water for them for their home.

Helena spent the rest of the morning working with Lana on getting food from the market they could keep for a week's worth of food, and they finished trying to rearrange their belongings in their new home. Lana wanted to go back to the market to see if there is anyone she could meet there; Helena wanted to head straight to the library to collect information.

Walking into the library, she tried to see where she'd need to go for books for the word she decided she wanted to do. As she turned a corner to go to a wing that contained Greek fiction and nonfiction, a gentleman walked up to her. "Pardon me, are you Helena -"

"Do I know you?" Helena answered, wondering who knew her name and wondering if she was not allowed there.

"I'm sorry, I'm a friend of Antony's, and he told me that his girl Helena is in town and would be coming to the library today."

She let a moment of silence pass before she answered. "I'm not his girl, but I am Helena."

"Oh," he answered. "Well, if you need anything at all, please feel free to track me down. My name is Pedibastet, and there are a few other people working here who knew of you being here, so I'm sure anyone can help you out."

"Thank you, I was just going to pull some books from authors like Sophocles and Socrates, or even some of Plato's writings."

"Helena, this section back here," the gentleman said as he walked further forward and turned right into a new wing with Helena following, "has Greek work from writers as far back in time as Homer. Do you need help finding anything in particular?"

"No, I'd like to just do some reading and take some notes," she answered, holding her tablet.

"There are extra ink wells at the tables over there, so good luck with your work."

"Thank you, Pedibastet," Helena said, as she started walking toward the aisles of books to see what her choices were.

She turned one corner and started reading titles of authors in the books set in rows on the shelves, listed in order of the dates of the writings.

Homer	Hesiod	Alcaeus	Sappho
Archilochus	Aesop	Thales	Anacreon
Simonides	Theognis	Thespis	Aeschylus
Bacchylides	Pindar	Hecataeus	Sophocles
Euripides	Socrates	Lysias	Aristophanes
Plato	Herodotus	Thucydides	Xenophon
Demosthenes	Aristotle	Menander	Dyskolos



Helena grabbed two volumes from Plato's work and was about to grab a book from Socrates, when Pedibastet walked from aisle to aisle to find her. "Helena, we just received a copied set of books from the philosopher/mathematician Aristotle. I don't know what you're looking for, but there -"

"What do you have. I want to see them."

Pedibastet saw Helena's eyes turn to saucers when he mentioned Aristotle. "Yes, these books were apparently in a vault until about 100 years ago, and they have been in a library in Athens. Before they were taken and brought to Rome, a scribe made a copy of the writings, and we were just able to get a copy of the volumes. So we have around 25 books."

Where are they? I'd like to look them over, please. And thank you."

They walked over to where the collection of books was held, and Helena immediately grabbed **Nicomachean Ethics**. "I might take **Magna Moralia** after I look over this one."

"Good first choice. I've heard people say that **Nicomachean Ethics** is usually favored over **Eudemian Ethics**."

"I've got plenty of work to do right now, with these other two books I first took. But thank you for letting me know about Aristotle's writings here in the library."

"Not a problem at all. What are you studying for?"

"I..." Helena didn't know what to answer, because the ideas she just created in her head was that she wanted to write, but she knew that as a woman her writings would be ignored. "I'm collecting writings and data for future work on a book."

"Does the writer have anything in the library?" Pedibastet asked.

"He doesn't, as of yet, I think he has just been collecting essays."

Oh. Maybe I know of his writings. What's his name?"

Helena had to quickly think of her pen name. "Agathangelos Alcaeus is his full writing name."

"Strength, and an angelic messenger - wonderful name for his work. I've never heard of the name, but I'll keep an eye out for it."

"Well, I should get to work for him, but thank you for everything."

Pedibastet smiled and went back to the other hall where he was originally working, and Helena turned to the row of tables so she could read and starting taking notes on her tablet for future work. As soon as she sat down, she pulled the pen from the holder and gave it some ink so she could write down her first thing in her notes. At the top and center on the page, she wrote 'Agathangelos Alcaeus', because she just gave herself a name for her future work.

The first thing she did was start reading over **Nicomachean Ethics**. She scribbled notes, and started immediately generating theories of moral and sound treatments for women who have been abused by men.

"...and if we do not choose everything for the sake of something else (for at that rate the process would go on to infinity, so that our desire would be empty and vain), clearly this must be the good and

the chief good. Will not the knowledge of it, then, have a great influence on life? Shall we not, like archers who have a mark to aim at, be more likely to hit upon what is right?"

*Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, book 1 chapter 2*

Helena knew that women were taught to be there for men, and they were taught to not fight back; she knew that women would not want to stand up for themselves, but something would have to be done if women would not be hurt from men in the future.

She had to stop and pull back from the table. She put her hand over her mouth. All she thought about was a forceful attack by a man to a woman, but this didn't happen to her. He just gave her liquor. "I know I don't drink," Helena thought, but there is no crime in drinking the way she did. Or the way Lana did, who drank more than her.

Wait, she thought, Antony was pushing the wine of Lana more than her, she remembered that much. But why was he doing that? Helena thought all along it was because he wanted the two of them to have fun, but then it occurred to her that Antony didn't have to worry about making any noises to wake Lana because she had passed out on the other mat.

It then clicked in Helena's mind. It was his intentional effort to make her roommate pass out so no one would stop him from doing what he thought he could to Helena.

When she realized this, the thought made her sick.

Then she realized there were many ways people could be using their power to gain more power, but she was sure that there would be no allowance for hurting others to achieve your own happiness. She happened to have **Nicomachean Ethics** in front of her, and this would only be one more scrap of evidence she would need to know that what was done to her was wrong.

She knew she couldn't tell anyone about it, she'd be forced to marry him - which she did not want. Maybe her writing would be her only way to win her rights back.

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Days after their arrival, Helena let Antony know that she did not want to see him; although he did not understand why, Antony had no choice but to let her go. During the next three months Helena worked in the library feverishly with help from Pedibastet and other men who worked at the library like Eutropius and Paramonos, and especially Ariston, a transcriber for book printings. After reading extensively from Aristotle, Pythagoras, a little writing from Parmenides. She tried to find writings from Anaxagoras and Anaximander, and during this time she learned to match writing styles to these philosophers and construct a number of essays on philosophy in reaction to non-violent behavior.

She made a point to make sure her references were not focused on treatment specifically, but underlying these readings, they could be used to help women as well. She managed through circulars to post smaller portions of some of her essays in common places so people could view them, and she even heard people talking about seeing the notes and reading them when they were in market near the postings.

One mid-week day in the library Helena found Ariston and asked him about his press capabilities.

"I don't work at a printer and declare what gets printed and distributed, but I transcribe things for those who need the type before printing," Ariston said.

"Oh," Helena said almost under her breath.

"What do you need it for?"

Helena looked up at him and asked, "Have you heard of Agathangelos Alcaeus?"

"...Yeah, I've seen postings of his around town. Alcaeus is a good writer, but I - wait - why did you ask me about him?"

"I've been taking notes for him and he was been writing in his spare time."

"Why doesn't he take the notes?"

"I don't think he has the time, Ariston. Besides, I don't mind doing the work and helping him out."

Ariston leaned back, and then moved forward to ask Helena his next question more personally. "You know, I do know people at the presses, and I think they'd like to get a hold of his works - especially the presses that do textbook printings. They might like his work. I can talk to them to see if they want his writing, or if they want to meet with him."

Helena couldn't quite believe what she was hearing. "I ... I'm sure he'd be thrilled ... He likes to lead a solitary life and he doesn't get out to talk to people, I'm sure I can talk to him about this, but he might want me to do his representing, but I can give you anything of his writings and do anything I can to help."

"Sure, that would be great."

"I could get rough copies of his writings for you, but I may only have one copy of some of the essays."

"Helena, I can transcribe anything, so I could probably make duplicates of everything so he doesn't have to lose his copy."

"Oh Ariston, that's wonderful. When would you like the writings?"

Ariston smiled. "Whenever you would like to give them to me."

Helena was too thrilled and said, "Name your time and place."

"...I can take you out to dinner and get these papers for transcribing."

"Let me give you notes to show you where I live," she answered, as she kept smiling and turned to a blank page to place directions on.