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Response

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Passion and Purpose: Two Sides of the Coin of Life

With the exception of the Amazons (and possibly Xena the Warrior Princess), women have been seen as second-class citizens for centuries, not equal to men in thought, ability, employment, and especially in power and under the law. Things began to change with early feminist icons like the Suffragettes and Rosie the Riveter. Lady Helena, in Isak Dinesen's short story "The Blue Jar" (1942), is such a feminist heroine who runs a merchant ship and lives freely on the open sea as she searches for rare blue china. Through her, Dinesen demonstrates that with perseverance and an independent spirit you can define and determine your own path to success, despite what other people may say or expect from you. Or in the modern parlance of Taylor Swift "haters gonna (sic) hate...shake it off...[just] keep cruising". We see this by Lady Helena's sheer determination to keep sailing and by how content she is at the end of her life having fulfilled her true purpose.

According to the film *Hustle & Flow*, "it's hard out here for a pimp, cause he's trying to have thangs (sic) but it's hard...it's blood, sweat, and tears". You know, like you actually have to work for what you want, even if you're a criminal! All joking aside, the truth is: everything that is worth having is worth working for, no matter who you are or what your goals. (Also, I have never heard anyone say that life was easy). And, who are we anyways without our goals and accomplishments, and the pride we take in achieving them? Lady Helena repeats several times: "Nay, I have got to sail" showing her dedication to her job but also to her passions – the sea

and the chase. In the end she found her trophy, one could argue through compulsion and a responsibility to the men in her employ. But I doubt that kind of perseverance can exist out of obligation and duty alone, and certainly not to be sustained over the course of a lifetime; no, that kind of perseverance needs passion, an inner fire. I believe this is shown through the shadow ship “...with which [she must] keep pace...as the moon draws the tides, all through the bulk of the earth...[and that when both ships sink]...there, in the midst of the world, we two shall meet” (2). I think these two ships represent her real self and her dream self which drives her to achieve her goal. We all have this split personality of a sort, and when you finally achieve all you’ve ever striven for, you feel complete. It’s her passion that drives her, and it’s our passion that sustains us when it’s hard out there. The question is: how do we find it?

Fear not! Like the Magic 8 ball of life, Oprah has all the answers! All you have to do is find your true purpose. You do this by taking Joseph Campbell’s advice to “Follow your bliss”. So, passion and purpose go hand in hand. In Lady Helena’s case, she followed in her father’s footsteps, and at an early age, found her true calling. Many people may look at her persistence as an obsession or even think her pursuit of a material object is trivial, but to her that blue jar is a symbol of the freedom and independence she had on the open sea for most of her life. Away from courtly life, from the gender expectations and social constraints that Victorian England held for her to find a “...great match” (2), she could live as she chose. And so, when she died, all she wanted to do was to go back there. To be forever enveloped in the blue of the ocean – literally where her heart lay, where her life’s purpose had been – so that “...in the midst of the blue world [her] heart will be innocent and free...” (2). So if you take her example, and you want to find eternal contentment and peace, all you need to do is find your purpose and pursue it with passion.

Ha! Easier said than done, considering that today, many of us feel like zombies, sleepwalking through life. We're on auto-pilot just getting through the day. We are so bombarded by technology, by reacting, by the latest Trump tweet, that we hardly have time to really think about what we really want. The sky may be the limit to our potential, but if we never look up, how will we find it? Oftentimes, this comes through struggle, conflict and hard work; as it did for Lady Helena, who butted up against her family's expectations, as well as those of her gender and her class. In this way, Modern writer Dinesen creates a real feminist heroine battling both herself and society to live her life on her own terms. By writing this allegory (metaphorical and kinda fairy-tale-ish) and setting the story back in a time where the constraints on women's freedoms were even greater, she shows the contrast of what we would become in the intervening years (and ever since). By 1942, it didn't seem weird to have a heroine, a Lady, sailing the open sea. After all we had Amelia Aerheart sailing the open air. As well, the structure of the story around the pursuit of the symbol of the blue jar – whose real meaning is never revealed - allows the reader to imagine whatever their own passion is that may be worth pursuing to similar lengths. Like Lady Helena, when I found my true passion, teaching, I haven't stopped. Not that I am going to cut my heart out and bury it in a book, mind you, but passion and purpose nonetheless, and I certainly have never worked harder for anything in my life than becoming a teacher, and trying to be good at it. It is a life's work. So I'd say that finding what you love and pursuing it to the ends of the earth is literally a literary lesson well worth the ages, no matter who you are. Literally. They are the two sides of the coin of life. Don't know where to start? Flip it. Lands on passion and you start with things you love to do and build from there. Lands on purpose and you start with what you do that makes you feel worthwhile. Either way, you'll be winning at life and on your way to fulfilling your destiny. Flip that coin today.