

Macedonia proves too small for me*

Mr Dreary could, incidentally, have hit upon many other names to put in place of the unfortunate Fram, if only he had been given a little time and not been caught off guard by the vicar in the middle of the ceremony. The ships that had set sail for uncharted oceans offered various splendid names to choose from. Just think of the proud squadrons with which Ferdinand Magellan embarked on his perilous passage. *Trinidad! Concepcion! Victoria!* What glory surrounded those names! I would willingly have borne every one of them. How readily the names which school tried to imprint on my mind have evaporated, while those that Mr Dreary taught me in those joyful, school-shirking lessons of the imagination will never be erased. The passing years have only enhanced the beauty of their symbolic sheen, which now has the lustre of old gold.

I can still keenly feel the shiver of sensual pleasure that would run up my spine as I sat on my stool at Mr Dreary's feet, listening with bated breath to his tales from the history of intrepid seafarers' feats. Only the highest heroism had the power to satisfy me, and tales that had no death-defying element left me completely unmoved. Mr Dreary himself derived indescribable enjoyment from these moments. As the situation came to a head and the starving and desperate crew threatened mutiny, he would suddenly go quiet and give me a meaningful look. I would quiver with excitement and my little heart would pound, yet I remained rooted to the spot and did not say a word, but kept my eyes fixed on his lips. Then he would stand up and strike a bold pose, as one would on deck in a challenging situation, staring death in the face, and declaim

some incredibly heroic phrase uttered by the leader of the expedition:

‘Even if I have to eat the leather wrappings of the ship’s spars, I shall not give in but will complete my task.’

We both loved such lines with a passion. They constituted the eagerly awaited climax of our story, and once it was finally reached we would fall into one another’s arms, overcome by an inexplicable emotion neither of us could control. We could hear the wind’s song in the ropes and rigging of the ships, and it was always the same wind, singing the same intoxicating song: intrepid feats are calling us, calling us... This was the wind that filled your sails, you *Trinidad*, *Concepcion* and *Victoria* of my childhood!

It was certainly not at home, in the blandness of Gräsviksgatan, that these dramas were played out. Oh no, nothing ever happened there, except the usual routines. It was in Mr Dreary’s shop, or to be more precise, in the dark little inner room that was supposed to be his office.

If you only saw me at home or at school, you would probably think me the decorous daughter my mother had wished for, a true Maria. I slept my way through life in that world. A burden weighed on my body and my soul, I felt tormented by my clothes, my plaits, my duties. This deep discomfort made me apathetic, which I assume to be the precondition for decorous conduct in childhood. My mother did everything to train me into domestic virtues, the only virtues a girl in our circles was felt to need. She placed particular emphasis on dusting. This loathsome ritual was performed each morning with meticulous thoroughness under the stern eye of my mother, with the consequence that I came to hate every piece of furniture and every ornament in our home. I detested all these things so profoundly that I would gladly have administered a kick or dashed them to the ground, had not fear held me back and forced me to do my rounds with a subservient expression, dusting and polishing in an idiotic and senseless fashion. If only the operation could have been left for a few days, at least for God’s sake a slight layer of dust would have settled and one would have felt there was some purpose in what one

Hagar Olsson

was doing. But no, the whole point of so-called women's work is that it is supposed to be so delicate as to be invisible! Total meaninglessness is the defining characteristic of all tasks considered constitutionally suitable for women.