

People Staring at Menus

I am not phased by this. I live underwater. Yes it's me. Yes me. In the underwater city I saw falling rock plunging into a dead volcano. I was not born in an underwater city. For my first communion I was taken to the zoo. Hyenas pelted me with dirt. It was the first time I had seen living wild animals although I had dreamed about them for years. I was born loving the zoo. When I was young I had visions of tortoises crossing my path or a very large cat sitting in an abandoned dog kennel. When I was twenty I bought myself a pair of jodhpurs and a hacking jacket. I began to have the stench of an animal. I found I had grown a horse's head. My outer form reflected my interior truth. I was exposed to shame pain despair and ridicule. I felt naked. I had a Shetland pony who came from the marina and I would ride her. My father was a textile tycoon before he established a business making agrichemicals. Before he became a rich married family man he had been a mill hand. He had once developed a patent for a certain kind of salutary blended wool. My family was both entrepreneurial and unconventional. Like mafiosos. I would not inherit the company. I was sent away to boarding school where I was unruly. I wrote with both of my hands. I was sent to a convent. I wrote backwards with my left hand. I was expelled then became friends with a bunch of artists. I began to paint. I liked minerals. I painted animals. I would grind hulking chunks of blood red cinnabar into ink and make paintings. I was called poor and homosexual. I went to see my family at the Ritz hotel. Then more seasons, yes. The next year's round of pleasure failed. When something really touches you — really — so you say — really — touches you — then it feels like it's burning. I cried for days on end. I improvised new methods new media. I replenished my store of fantasies. I was good at that. I met people. I had not yet grown up enough to know the full implications of what I said. I was sexual and transgressive and wild. I was told I was sexual and transgressive and wild. In my art I made imaginary beings. I fell in love and we went to the Provinces. There was war all around us. I wrote a story and made very few corrections to it because I preferred a mess. My lover left me without explanation. I was stricken. I wondered why I had such a warped sense of allegiance. I think I was practicing for death. I met a marquis a man who smoked opium an architect and a man who called himself a man of letters. I brought down my youthful vengeance on all their heads. But to make anybody into gossip is to miss the point of them. I disguised myself as a man and undertook a journey to the Himalayas. I was testing my relationship to authority. I was not whole only young. I was personally frustrated at being a girl and not on account of some inner psychological inability to accept my intelligence nor my femaleness. "I was unbearably constrained by society." I had to wash all day and say thank you for everything. You should have seen the clothes they made me wear. When I eloped with my true love I had to dress like a boy just to pass through the city gates. Someone painted a portrait of me wearing armor. I was an animist in a world of hedgehogs and donkeys. No one could get as up-close to wild animals as well as I could. I read penny-dreadful picture romances. I experienced a

week in which everybody was kind to me. I wrote a pamphlet on what it meant to lead an exemplary life. But sometimes I felt like the only purpose of being alive was to undergo yet more suffering. I managed to hold on to my well-bred manners with occasional moments of socially acceptable irreverence. I managed to maintain an inconsequent dry tone when speaking to others. My life had given me a heaped storehouse of experiences to draw from in my creative making. On the days I did not need to work there was the daily round: lighting candlesticks — saying what shall we do today? I became the owner of a house. I trained to become an air force pilot. I disturbed the earth's magnetic field. I told lies and was burned to death but I was not bad at heart. I felt the eyes of others on me. I adopted a stance. I identified with some people and disapproved of others. Some of them commented on my looks and demeanor. Sometimes I felt myself being hypnotized. Sometimes I felt as if I were at the effect of obscure and occult commands and instructions. Sometimes I felt I was being determined by them. I argued with sound currents. I refused everything on purpose. I went to live in the hills. I went to work in a laundry. I went to live in a farm-house. I made a fish-head out of cement. I painted the exterior walls of the house. I learned to speak French like an eccentric. Every day I expressed mock-solemnity at sundown. I achieved a rare tone: I was both naïve and perverse. I was in generally high spirits and felt as if I had found a new way of living. Even the culinary arts became a form of play. For two days I cooked everything with squid's ink and put my guests' hair in the soup. There were still days when I felt cowardice corruption and silence everywhere. The collapse of social structures. I got depressed anxious and insane. I went insane. Right. Me. Yes me. I will give you an exceptionally clear and detailed account of the experience of going insane. It has a very peculiar flavor. Without the taxonomy of ripe and unripe [and without sweet sour bitter salty umami] a world without the taxonomy of predator and prey. I will tell you about my hair-raisingly unhinged behavior. One is both instrument of power and victim. I was suffering but not in an ordinary human dimension. It was the kind of dementia that others had only been able to simulate. I won applause from a few romantics. You can see I have a complicated history. I trained to become a surgeon specializing in incurable abscesses. I got an apartment in the city's converted abandoned Russian embassy where some refugees still lived. We shared friendly glances. I began to see faces in all forms of water. You see I uncovered marvelous geometrical patterns everywhere I looked. I had other experiences that marked me. I tried to end the barbaric practice of bullfighting. I met people with whom I shared a deep bond of fantasy feeling and experience. I ventured out on an ice floe. I got an excellent haircut. I bought stripy socks. I bought a coat that looked like it had belonged to a newlywed. I purchased carpet pajamas. I appeared twice. Holding my glass lantern, I talked to the red birds in the icy landscape again and again. I went to the eloquent jungle. I resisted commenting on my own life. I stopped thinking in symbols. I knew life in exile. I knew how to be a beautiful ripe bride. I knew how to hold myself at a distance. I knew how to be moved or unmoved by somebody's presence. I knew how to be incomparably original. I knew how to dwell on injustice. I knew how to move on from the past. I knew how to be nostalgic and I knew how to be old. I knew how to be attractive and repulsive. I knew rejection. I knew how

to part from others amicably. I knew motherhood. I knew savage optimism and how to be delicate depending on the situation. I knew context was everything. I lived in a gothic cathedral. I committed suicide. I was a pilgrim. I met a lama. I talked to the sphinx. I wore a garter. I found the fulcrum point where love fear and passion met. I did things that weren't good for my health. I emptied myself out. I vomited. I emptied myself and broke spells. I drank. I ate. I picked too quickly at scabs. I cultivated my palette. I said I believed (*i/*). I preferred sea foam to rhizome. The world was quiet and still. I noisily raked leaves. I got drunk and looked ugly in every picture I took of myself. I put myself above criticism. This little skunk made of skunk. I tried not to be disappointed. Sometimes there was help. I walked in the enchanted landscape.

