

**WOMAN
ON A
ROCKY
BEACH**

1

She has done this: She has made nothing into her something. Not like the philosopher: not in a way where we can deduce and understand. More then, like an artist, does she make nothing into something. The nothing stays bad and incomprehensible. With her, nothing is not everything, like some philosophers claim it to be, maybe claimed, maybe they are all dead now. The nothing stays just as it is. And she does not know what to do about it, so she thinks: I am nothing, this is nothing, they are nothing, there is nothing. Only volume. She tunes out, but will be kept alive by the instincts of her body. She is approaching zero, she is a zero, a loser. What a cruel thing to say! It is true, though. For the moment she is worthless. Even more cruel, hehe. Oh, poor woman.

Here she is:

“Nothing” she says out loud, sluggishly. Her arms fold between and over the things that lie scattered on the desk. Her forehead leans one arm and then the other, when the first is numb. A shred of paper has tangled into her curls. If cats can lie on all the things on a table, then so can a woman when her head feels heavy like a big bucket of water that needs to be set down. If she keeps it on top of her shoulders, despite the pull of gravity, the neck will curve, and under it the back too, and over time give her an ugly look.

What she should do is lie down. When she is leaden, grievous, full of ennui and the desperate boredom of hopelessness. Let

the body rest, and maybe fall asleep. Or lie awake until an idea comes from the dark, restful insides. Paint the walls a nice, dark blue. If you have the energy to choose the right color. I will paint the walls for you, although you should really do it yourself. Herself. Her, she.

She does not get a good rest on the desk. She is nothing like cats, but goes from one uncomfortable position to another and back again, and finally she must sit up. Her hands, limp, pick up one of the things lying about. After holding it for a time, she puts it down again and looks out the window. It rains. She goes over to the door and stands in the doorframe to have a look at the weather. It is raining pretty hard, but not so hard that it is delightful to look at. She leans her head to the wooden board of the doorframe, in a way that makes her ear come flat against it. There, in the wood, is a sound like that inside a big shell: of the sea. Then she goes back inside.

No, go to the sea! Find a beach, *your* beach. Find a deep chair, soft, pillow-like. One that gives way just right for your heavy body. Eat hamburgers, drink carrot-juice and watch the seagulls, how they land in a way that gives a feeling of falling, but slowly. After all, nothing is not the worst if you love it, if she loved it. Then she would not be poor, just difficult.

Part five or six in documentaries about life on earth makes a good show of the life that persists in awkward places. In the most desolate deserts, in underground caves where there is never sunshine, and in the deepest ocean pits where the pressure is immense. If one knows how, where and when to look, there is body-heat. Organisms with screwed up systems

and routines: habitually starving, with multiple hearts, staying outside only a minute per day, etcetera. Nobody would make a documentary about this woman on a beach of jagged rocks, but here is some attention to her: She who holds herself in nothing. In earlier times, she would have been rooted out by natural selection. Oh no, that is so mean! She must never read this.

2

I dreamt that I was in a Western which I can not remember having seen. I think it must have been before or after something had happened or were to happen, because it felt like everything rested. I saw some people here and there who I think I must have seen in a movie some time, and there was a Hollywood tension that could be felt. It was there in everything I saw: a door ajar, a window beating, dust lifted from the ground by the wind and now falling down again with light coming through it. I walked in a small street past saloons, a hotel and the sheriff's office, and I thought it would be possible to push open a door, but I did not try, because I knew they were just well-made props and I did not want to break the illusion. A horse whinnied to my left. White with small spots and standing on its hind legs. Then, a clamor was approaching quickly, but before I could see what it was, I stepped into a big hole in the ground. I did not wake up right away, so only today did I remember the dream, when I was out walking, and saw a white horse with small spots grazing in a backyard.

3

There is a place by this ocean, where a woman can go down to the water unseen. No one bothers to go to the rocky beach. It is not a beach, but we can call it so. She will go in between and over rocky formations and sit and watch the mirror of the water. Like a heart, it is never still. A seagull swallows a starfish three times the size of its head. When the waves are low, she slips off her sandals and sticks her legs into the cold water. This is wilderness. The leopard skirt fits well here. Sun, water, rocks, woman. A voice will shatter everything.

They want an answer, cooperate mouth. She will not say no to a lift home. She will take the sandwich. Gaze out of the window. The body stays in the stuffy back seat. Painted houses, warm pavement. Diary entries, gifts of golden necklaces. Information booklets that teach her what she needs to know. Wash the salty legs with a clean towel.

4

The sun stays high in the sky all day. It does not go to cool down behind the mountains. The land gets dry, not eager for sun anymore. Skeletons, dusty winds, even the shade is too hot.

Down comes the mountainside, racing, sliding, crushing. The sea canal below the mountain will swallow the rocks and only become more shallow.

The woman walks by on the sidewalk on that side of the canal. She is wearing glasses today. I never saw that before. She is still squinting, because of the strong sunlight. She should be wearing sunglasses. Everyone knows that the side of the mountain will fall off today, and even the exact time it is going to happen. They have all crowded up on this side of the canal to watch it as it goes. She does not know, because she has not been paying attention. Or, nobody told her, hoping nobody else would either. She seems oblivious over there, to the fact that the sidewalks are completely empty around her, and this side of the street is full of people and balloons. Through these binoculars I see her empty expression, but I do not see her thoughts and feelings. For all I or we know, she can be from another planet, and at the moment of impact, she will dissolve into a mist of atoms and float back home.

5

There is the pine forest. It is compact. There is the lake that the children drown in, but not mine. There lies the road that goes back and forth. There the car, I open the car-door to go in to sit. One of my children passes the car, and does not turn to look at me. This is how it is. Once I knew how to do things, now mirrors break at the sight of me. I could tend children and slaughter pigs and get someone to take me home. Here, in this place between elements, the sky is white and dense, very close. Under it the house is flaking off. With a habitual sense of time, I look toward the forest, and he appears there, between the trees. Walking with substantial steps. I will go inside and make dinner. There are many at the table today and all days. Food made in loads does not taste good. And then I am going to be who I am by the table and lose my knife on the floor, so that the children learn not to lose their knives on the floor. They do not want to be like their mother. The eldest said to me that I should fix my hair. On the kids my frizz are beautiful black curls that they adorn with ribbons which they were given by someone else. Their curls hop gently over their small necks when they look up at him and nod at whatever he says.

6

She is holding the telephone against her head. I imagine her lounging on a sofa-bed with a silk kimono, soft legs and naked feet sticking out. She has one of those hair-do's that took time and effort to make. She does not have a proper face. Where her face should have been, there is a vortex. The body and the sofa and the telephone seem to be the only fixed things. The house around her is in flux. It is like she does not know where she lives. Walls, ceilings, furniture and things are falling in a series of fallings. I do not know who she is speaking with on the telephone. Probably, she just picked it up without dialing a number, and started talking. It is best to pretend that there is someone listening. With the telephone it is easy. She says something, but she could easily have said something else, she could have said whatever. Her legs are soft, her kimono is soft, and her hair is crisp with hairspray. Her hand is loose around the telephone. She listens to the silence inside her head. She draws lines in the fabric of the sofa-bed with her fingertip that lost its long nail. It broke off to the flesh when she was doing something. She does not remember what it was. She uses a false one until it grows out again, but now it lies in the bathroom by the mirror, in a cup. It is falling down in a continuous rain of bathroom articles. She strokes the silvery fabric with her hand and starts drawing new lines. Just lines, no image, distractedly, to connect something with something. Empties with empties. The room is still. The pretty debris moves slowly, or maybe fast. The abstract inside of a woman's head moves so slow and so fast at the same time. Some things can move so fast, that they rather seem to be

standing still. Some things, for example a piece of earth, look still, but on closer inspection, with a looking-glass, it is afire with activity, like when you poke a stick into an anthill to mess it up. Her thoughts flow quicksilvery and are still like a rock or even a diamond. I think she must feel how her house is sliding down the hill, slowly and quickly. It is happening with the beat of her heart, crystalized. I'm not who I am, she says, like it was the only thing she could say. I hope the box of kittens she ordered will arrive at the door soon.

7

Something strange occurred during the warm weeks of summer, between July and August. I worry that it signals a stirring of old notions in the people, but for the moment, I am willing to dismiss it as an effect of the heat, combined with restlessness.

A woman was seen several times around the village, in half secluded places. Those who saw her were always alone. I say *a* woman, but the descriptions seen under one are unclear on this point. It seems that there were in reality many different women, because the portrayals vary between stout and skinny, tall and very short, young and aged. Still, the bigger picture makes everybody think it could also be just one person, and that the differences lay in the beholder. She always had curly hair, for example, and it was told that she carried a normal attire, but wore it in a peculiar way: different but not very. It seems as though the clothes just fit oddly on her, or maybe she was pulling them downwards, so that they looked stretched. The most peculiar thing, was this: Sitting on a rock with her back to the view and face toward the one passing by, she was seen face to face: But she did not return the look, seem startled or say hello, as would be the expected reaction. Her gaze remained a thousand meters off into the air, through the person and the vegetation, as though she did not see there was anyone there. And yet there was a strong feeling of contact. Everyone knows that this is nothing, but still, those who saw her experienced an otherworldly eeriness, and felt out of place for days after, and haunted, looking for

her in the shadows that fell behind big things, the darkest places in mid-summer. And even though her face was entirely visible to the one who stumbled upon her, nobody could describe her features. In fact, everyone agreed that if it was not for the hair, she looked like anybody, very familiar. Curly hair is found only on strangers here, like myself and one or other tradesman passing through.

The encounters with the strange woman were upsetting the people, and at the same time it all grew into something festive. They were scaring and entertaining one another with her, and obviously making up new stories about mermaids and magical actions. Also, completely unlike them, I heard poetic observations being made: The stems of the wheat in the fields shining with a blue light under the sun. The bottom of the pine forest seeming to look purple in the evening.

None of this was told to me personally. All the descriptions in the following documents are drawn up after eavesdropping. When I asked them questions, directly or very carefully, the response was always a badly constructed incomprehension or pats on the back. Now, a month has passed since I last overheard a mention of someone seeing her. It is therefore a suitable time for this brief summary to go with the box of documents. It will be filed away, and may it stay so and not become any fuller. I believe the whole affair is being gradually forgotten with all the work autumn brought. Still I will keep my senses alert. The women, and even the girls, have recently started rolling up their hair at night, wet, to try to make curls. I learned it from the doctor, who has had a lot to do because of it. As usual, he did not tell me at once, but had to be given something for it. Still, I have seen no curls. I think their hair

must be too soft. This way, the trend will fade in a natural way and, hopefully, it will be the last episode of this story.

8

In the photograph, she is moving her leg. In the photograph, she is keeping it in mid air. She sits on sharp cliffs by the ocean water. Her hair is tousled. She must have had better curls in the morning. I can not see her eyes properly under the shadows of her eyebrows. She has her eyes closed or she is squinting in the bright light. There is a deep wrinkle between her eyebrows. She is not pretty, if you really look closer at her. She looks uncomfortable, like she is trying at something but not pulling it off. Her sweater is dark, curled up to the elbows. Her skirt is bright with dark spots, of a shiny fabric. She is wearing sandals. We can see the foot she is holding in mid air. Perhaps she is putting the leg across the other, womanly, or getting up to leave. She is wearing a watch. I pick up my big lens and try to see her more clearly. It *is* a watch. I can not see her eyes properly. And then I hold the lens in such a way that someone appears behind her, right behind her. It is off course herself, she is standing directly behind herself, hovering a bit over her shoulders like a ghost. And then the head starts floating over her head, and the entire woman stretches out, and she looks so nauseated. The corners of her mouth turn downwards, and I think she is going to puke.