## He Had Never Known a Woman More

love is the whole history of women's lives - Anne-Louise-Germaine de Staël

He had never known a woman more continuously exacting (said the lover she had had longer than any other), having to have at her disposition

everybody's entire existence every hour every minute for years on end or else he said there is an explosion like all earthquakes and thunderstorms put together.

Taking herself to be an incarnation of the Cumaean Sybil's alter ego (swathed in silks and manuscripts, intense, voluptuous, imperious, feline)

like the lovelorn heroine of her novel (an artist independent yet vulnerable emotionally), she became the model new woman for that new age.

Married to a handsome ambassador, she had four children who bore his surname and personally saved at least a dozen people from the revolutionary beheading machine.

Said to have been the richest woman in Europe (heiress to her father's Swiss banking empire the main funding to bring Napoleon down) she kept up a highly personal vendetta

with the pint-sized Alexander of the day, hosted the most famous salon of the era and to each prospective lover recounted the amorous failings of the previous one. I've always been in love with my father

she said, and had he been younger would have wedded him gladly. At 51, shortly after marriage to a hussar young enough to be her son (a little Scottish melody she said, speech is not his language) she died. Her favorite word was *enthusiasm* not she said to be confused with *fanaticism*. When the existence of man is expansive it holds something of the divine.