

that holds together brother and sister, part jealousy and part affection, a hatred at its roots, is a persistence that transcends politics. Things are simple on the surface and complicated underneath. A story, too, should be simple on the surface and complicated underneath, and all the difficulty of art lies in this illusion.

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Natalia Ginzburg

*A Summary Bibliography*

All copyright Giulio Einaudi Editore, Turin

*La strada che va in città*. Short novel, 1941.

*È stato così*. Short novel, 1947.

*Valentino*. Short novel, 1951.

*Tutti i nostri ieri*. Novel, 1952.

*Sagittario*. Short novel, 1957.

*Le voci della sera*. Short novel, 1961.

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Natalia Ginzburg    *T W O   S K E T C H E S*    Translated by Donald Heiney

## My Psychoanalysis

Once I resorted to psychoanalysis. It was summer, just after the war, and I was living in Rome. It was a sultry dusty summer. My analyst had an apartment in the central district. I went to him every day at three. He himself would open the door (he had a wife, but I never saw her). In his office it was shadowy and cool. Dr. B. was an elderly man, tall and bald, with a ring of silvery curls around the nape of his tanned neck, a small dark mustache, high and rather narrow shoulders. His shirt was always immaculate, with the collar open. The extreme neatness of his shirts and the cool shadow of his office were the things

that struck me from the first. He had an ironic smile and a German accent. On his finger he wore a large monogrammed brass ring, his hands were white and delicate, eyes ironic, gold eyeglasses. He had me sit at a table and he sat opposite me. On the table there was always a large glass of water for me, with an ice-cube and a twist of lemon. In those days nobody in Rome had a refrigerator, if you wanted ice you had to go to the dairy-shop for it and break it up with a hammer. How he managed to get hold of those clear polished ice-cubes every day is a mystery to me. Possibly I might have asked him this, but I never did ask him. I felt that, except for the office and the little entry that led to the office, the rest of the apartment was and had to be veiled in mystery. The ice and water came from the kitchen, where perhaps the invisible wife had prepared this refreshment for me.

The friend who had suggested that I go to Dr. B., and who went to him herself, hadn't told me much about him. She had said he was Jewish, Jungian, and German. The fact that he was Jungian was a positive factor for her; to me it didn't matter, because I had only a confused notion of the difference between Jung and Freud. So one day I asked Dr. B. to explain the difference to me. He launched off into an explanation and at a certain point I lost the thread, distracted by his brass ring, the silvery curls over his ears and the forehead with its horizontal creases, which he wiped with a clean linen handkerchief. I felt as though I were at school, when I asked for something to be explained and then got lost in thinking about something else.

This feeling of being in school, in the presence of a teacher, was one of my many mistakes in the course of my analysis. Since Dr. B. had told me I ought to write down my dreams in a notebook, before going to him I would sit in a café and furiously scribble down dreams, like a pupil doing his homework. I should have felt like a patient with a doctor. But I didn't feel sick, only full of obscure and confused guilt. He himself didn't seem like a real doctor to me. Sometimes I would look at him with the eyes of my parents, who were far away, in the north, and it seemed to me my parents wouldn't have cared much for him. He looked nothing like the people they associated with. They would have found the brass ring ridiculous and the curls frivolous, they would have mistrusted the peacock-feather-and-velvet furnishings of the studio. Besides my parents had a firmly rooted idea that analysts were not real doctors, and that sometimes they could be rather dubious characters. The thought that I was doing a thing that would have appalled my parents made the analysis simultaneously fascinating and repugnant to me. I didn't know then that Dr. B. was a very eminent analyst, and that knowledgeable people highly regarded by my parents admired him and went to him themselves. I believed him to be completely unknown and obscure, someone my friend and I had stumbled on by accident.

As soon as I arrived I would start talking like mad because I thought this was what he expected of me. I thought that if I stayed silent he would have stayed silent too, and my sitting there in that office would have become utterly meaningless. He would listen to me while he smoked with an ivory holder, a combination of irony and profound attention always in his glance. I never asked myself then whether he was intelligent or stupid, but now I realize that the light

of his intelligence shone acutely upon me. It was the light of his intelligence that showed me my way in that black summer.

I had a great love of talking to him. Perhaps the word "love" may seem inappropriate, since what is involved is analysis, that is something not very lovable in itself, bitter and painful. Yet I never had reason to notice this painful side of analysis, which I heard about only later from others. It is possible that my analysis was imperfect. There was no question that it was imperfect. I spoke with such a rush that today it seems clear to me I wasn't exerting myself to wrench secrets from my soul, instead simply dashing along in disorderly fashion after some obscure point I was not yet aware of. I had the constant feeling that the central point remained yet to be said. I talked so much and yet I never managed to tell the whole truth about myself.

It was a great vexation to me that I had to pay him money. If my father had known, not only about my analysis, but also about the money I spent on Dr. B., he would have let out a howl loud enough to bring the house down. But it was not so much the idea of my father's howl that made me uncomfortable. It was the thought that I was paying money for the attention which Dr. B. dedicated to my words. I was paying for his patience with me. (Although I was supposed to be the patient, it was he who seemed the patient one.) I was paying for his irony, his smile, the shadowy silence of the office, the water and the ice, I was getting none of this free and I found this intolerable. I told him this, and he replied it was to be expected. He seemed to have foreseen everything, I never took him by surprise. Everything I told him about myself he had known for a long time, because others had suffered and thought the same things. This annoyed me but at the same time it was a great solace, because when I had thought these things to myself, in my solitude, I sometimes felt myself too strange and isolated to have any right to live.

Then there was another thing between me and Dr. B. that seemed to me absurd, and that was the unilateral nature of our relationship. If the business of money enraged me, this unilateral factor seemed to create between us a deep and irrevocable awkwardness. I was supposed to talk about myself, but it was absolutely out of the question for me to ask him about himself. I never asked him because it never occurred to me to ask him, and because he himself seemed to treat his personal life with the utmost circumspection and tact. Yet when I left him I tried to imagine his wife, the other rooms of the apartment, his life apart from analysis. I found that something essential was excluded from our relationship, that is, mutual compassion. Even the water he gave me to drink every day was not to slake my thirst. It was part of a ceremony, ordained by a person or persons unknown, and one that neither he nor I could omit. In this ceremony there was no room for compassion. I was not supposed to know anything about his thoughts or his life. And if he, examining my soul and my life, happened to feel compassion for me, this sort of unilateral compassion that asked for nothing in return except money had nothing to do with real compassion, which carried with it always the possibility of mutual giving, of response. It is true that I was the patient and he was the doctor. But my illness, if there was one, was an illness of the soul, the words that passed between us every day con-

cerned my soul and it seemed to me that in such a relationship a common friendship and compassion were essential. And yet I felt that compassion and friendship were inadmissible in that office, and that if some pale spectre of them appeared it was proper to ban it from our conversation.

Once he lost his temper with me and I found this comic. I had met in the street a girl I knew who was also, I knew, under analysis with him (I had gradually found out that a lot of people I knew went to him). This girl told me I was wrong to undergo analysis when I was a writer, because analysis might cure my mind but kill the creative faculty in me. I told this to Dr. B. and he flew into a temper: I had never seen him angry, I had never seen any expression in him but the ironic smile. He pounded his fine brass-ringed white hand on the table and told me it was wrong and the girl was an idiot. If I had been analysed by a Freudian, he told me, it might possibly have happened that I would lose the desire to write, but he was a Jungian and therefore this would not happen. On the contrary I would write better books the better I came to understand myself. He went on to explain to me the difference between Jung and Freud. I lost the thread of the explanation and got distracted, and to this day I don't know very clearly what the difference is between Jung and Freud.

One day I told him that I could never manage to fold blankets neatly and this gave me a feeling of inferiority. He left the office for a moment and came back with a blanket, folded it by holding it under his chin and wanted me to try it the same way. I folded the blanket and to please him I told him I understood, but it wasn't true, because even today I find it difficult to fold blankets neatly.

One night I dreamed that my daughter was drowning and I was saving her. It was a very colorful dream full of precise details, the lake or sea was a violent blue and on the shore was my mother in a large straw hat. Dr. B. told me that my mother in this dream represented my past femininity and my daughter my future femininity. I had always accepted his explanations of my dreams, but this time I rebelled and told him it was impossible that dreams were always symbols, that I had dreamed of nothing but my daughter and my mother and it stood for nothing, simply that I missed them, especially my daughter whom I hadn't seen for months. In contradicting him I believe I showed a certain amount of impatience. This was perhaps the first sign that my interest in psychoanalysis was deteriorating and that I felt like turning to something else. In the analysis sessions we began arguing, because I claimed I ought to leave Rome and go back to the north. I had the notion that my children would be better off in Turin, since my parents were there and that was our home. According to Dr. B. I was in error about this and I should settle down in Rome with my children. I told him all the trouble I had had in making a home in Rome, but he shrugged and said I was getting all excited about nothing and I ought to face up to my responsibilities. He said I was making false duties for myself. Out of this matter of real and false duties our first real disagreement was born. Meanwhile the weather had turned cool and one day I found him with his shirt-collar buttoned, wearing a bow tie. This bow tie along with his austere Jewish personality seemed silly to me, the stupidest possible sign of frivolity. I didn't bother telling him this,

since my relations with him had become pointless anyhow. I abruptly stopped going to him and sent him the last of the money I owed along with a brief note. I'm sure he wasn't surprised and had foreseen everything. I left for Turin and never saw Dr. B. again.

In Turin, in the months that followed, I would sometimes wake up at night thinking of something that might be useful in my analysis that I had forgotten to tell him. Occasionally I even found I was talking to myself in a German accent. The years went by, and if I ever thought of my analysis it was simply as one of the many things I had started and not finished, simply out of muddle, stupidity, and confusion. Much later I moved back to Rome. The place where I lived was only a little way from Dr. B.'s office, I knew he was still there and once or twice the idea came to me to drop in and say hello. But our relations had been founded on such a peculiar basis that a simple hello would not have been appropriate. I felt that the old ceremony would immediately have begun again, the table, the glass of water, the smile. I couldn't offer him friendship, I could only offer him the burden of my neuroses, but I had learned to live with the neuroses and finally I had forgotten them. Then one day I learned that Dr. B. had died. If a place exists where we are reunited with the dead, I will surely meet Dr. B. there and our conversations will be straightforward and have nothing to do with analysis, and may be even happy, tranquil, and perfect.

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## On Old Age

Here we are becoming what we never wanted to become, to wit, old. Old age is something we have neither desired nor expected; and when we tried to imagine it it was always in a superficial, vague, and negligent way. It never inspired us with either a profound curiosity or a profound interest. (In the story of Little Red Riding Hood the character that interested us the least was the grandmother, and we didn't really care whether she got out of the wolf's stomach or not). The funny thing is that, even now when we are getting old ourselves, we still don't take any interest in old age. So a thing is happening to us that never happened to us to this day: up to now we have gone along year by year always filled with a lively curiosity about the changes that were taking place in our contemporaries; now we feel as though we are moving toward a gray region where we will become part of a gray throng whose affairs stir neither our curiosity nor our imagination. Our glance will remain forever fixed on youth and childhood.

What old age means in us, essentially, is the end of astonishment. We will lose the power to be astonished by ourselves or astonished by others. We will marvel no longer at anything, having spent our lives marveling at everything; and the others won't marvel at us, either because they have already seen us do our tricks or because they won't even be looking at us. What may happen is that we will become old junk forgotten among the weeds, or glorious ruins visited with