

Summer and Winter

Judith W. Taschler

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Consultation with therapist, January 1990

Dr B and Martina Winter (21)

My name's Martina and I'm twenty-one. I've lived in Innsbruck for three years, and I'm a student there. You want to know what I'm studying? Psychology and Education.

After the police called I went straight to the clinic with Anna.

I feel sorry for Alexander most of all. I wanted to give him a hug and talk to him, but he's not letting us anywhere near him. He won't see anyone! But there are a lot of things he needs to talk about. He's never been one for talking – he was always quiet and... different, in a way. He was too quiet for Father these last few years – it often got him annoyed.

No one's ever talked about anything in our family – everything's swept under the carpet, and when it comes to talking about Alexander, or talking to him, they keep schtum more than ever. So talking's really crucial, for all of them. Take our names, say. He's Sommer, we're Winter. It's like a bad joke! It was crappy for him at school – all the questions from teachers who weren't from the village, and the hotel guests most of all – they were always banging on about it.

The other kids teased him a lot about it – him, and Manu too. The two of them were in the same class.

What he really needs now is to pour his soul out – he shouldn't bottle it up. There's been enough bottling up done already, as we now know.

We hadn't a clue what he was doing in his spare time and why he sometimes went away. Sure, when he was in Innsbruck he sometimes stayed over at my place. But he never told me what he did all day long in the city. I thought he was looking for work or a room. He wanted to get away from home as soon as he could. I did too – I couldn't stand it in the village either.

The whole thing must be awful for him. I feel so, so sorry for him.

Consultation with Therapist, January 1990

Dr Z and Alexander Sommer

Something happened – that’s why I did the thing with the worm in the soup. I was almost eleven at the time.

Money belonging to one of the guests went walkabout, and right away my parents suspected that I was the thief. It wasn’t me, but they questioned me over and over for more than an hour – it was a right inquisition.

They also told me off, and they did it in front of the guest, in such a... a hostile way. But, you know, I already hated them a bit by then.

It was a woman – the guest was a woman, I mean.

She was a really fat, old woman, a German – I can’t remember exactly where she was from. I do remember that we called her ‘fat cow’ behind her back – she wolfed down her food so quickly it was incredible! And she always ordered three or four desserts after dinner, and she hoovered them all up too.

She was there on her own. She stayed with us for a fairly long break – about three or four weeks. Not in winter – in summer. Every morning she’d go for a little walk, if you can really call it that, and every afternoon she’d sunbathe on the balcony. And that was it – that was all she did. I’d find that kind of holiday totally boring.

And then one time she burst in to dinner all upset and demanded to see Mother. She started going on at her in this horrible, loud, frantic voice. Of course, we all overheard, as we always had to help out at breakfast and dinner, either in the kitchen or getting the drinks orders, or clearing up.

Her purse had been emptied, she said, waving her hands around. A thousand Schillings were missing – her driving licence was the only thing left. She’d left her purse lying on the table in her room, and that morning the money had still been there.

Mother was so embarrassed by the whole thing. She wanted to calm the woman down and asked her whether she was sure there was so much money in there, and whether perhaps she might have forgotten that she had bought something that morning. That only made the woman madder, and she shouted all the more. Did the Tyroleans really think that everyone else in the world was dumb? These Tyroleans, with their peasants’ cunning, did they really think they could clean everyone out like trussed up geese?

The prices are an absolute cheek anyway, and then they go and steal from you as well, she yelled. At first we just grinned – me, Anna, Martina and Manu did, I mean – the woman got so red in the face. But I wasn’t smiling for long.

Mother finally managed to quieten her down a bit and told her that she'd take care of it.

The woman sat down at her table and scoffed her dinner – soup, the main course, a salad and four desserts – before sweeping out of the dining room without a word of thanks.

Right afterwards, back in the kitchen during washing-up, Mother asked me, 'You were in Room 14 this afternoon, weren't you, doing the towels?'

I nodded. That afternoon I had had to put fresh towels in the rooms, as Anna had forgotten to do it in the morning when she was cleaning the rooms. And then she went off on one. I can remember it all clearly, as if it happened just yesterday. How can I put it... from that day onwards something changed inside me. I no longer felt that I had such a duty towards them – a feeling of duty, I mean.

She took me into the laundry room and suddenly slapped me. I was completely shocked. She whirled round and slapped my face. Then she began to rant and rave at me at the top of her voice. I sat with her the whole evening in the laundry room, and later Father came too. The pair of them really believed that I'd taken the money! But it genuinely wasn't me. They asked me again and again why I'd done it and where the money was. Why was I the only one under suspicion, the one being badgered for a confession? I was completely knackered and I just wanted to go to sleep – it was already late at night. But they said, you'll sit here for as long as it takes for you to tell the truth. They glowered down at me, with crossed arms. Their stern look – it really... really pinned me to the spot, and they threatened me with a whole load of punishments.

If it had been a couple of years later, I'm sure I'd have started laughing and just marched past them out of the laundry room.

But back then I wasn't bold enough – I had too much respect for them, and fear too, whenever they went into a rage and told me off. We were all like that, and it was only when we were about fifteen or sixteen that we gradually got brave enough to disobey them at times.

But back then I still didn't have the courage for it. I hadn't a clue what to do. I just wanted to go to bed. I even thought, I'll just say it – it was me – just to get some peace. Just to put an end to the whole thing, so they'd stop with all the shouting.

At one point I even thought, perhaps it really was me – it must have been me, if they're so utterly convinced of it!

Then Mother gave Father a real look, and quietly said, 'I know that it was him – our girls wouldn't do anything like that.' Then she left the laundry room, giving me a backwards glance as though I was the scum of the earth. Father went on having a go at me for a while. If he'd known that I was going to turn into a thief, he'd never have taken me in, he said... and some other stuff too.

He locked me in the laundry room, to reflect on my misdeed. The next day I was to apologise to the woman right away, at breakfast.

I tried to get a bit of sleep lying on the floor. I hated them both so much – for hours I felt the hatred welling up inside me, all the while knowing that I couldn't do a thing about it.

The next day they wouldn't let me go to school – I had to wait until the woman had sat down to breakfast. Father gripped me by the elbow and pushed me towards her table.

When I got there I stammered that I was sorry for taking her money. There was nothing else I could have done. Father gave her a thousand Schillings and apologised again a couple of times for the upset. Afterwards he said to me that unless I gave him the stolen money I'd have to pay him back by working.

After that, Father took me in to school and had a quick word with the teacher about why I was late. Of course, there were a couple of boys earwigging at the door, and for weeks afterwards I was known around the school as a thief.

Conversation with therapist, January 1990

Dr Z and Alexander Sommer

I was friends with Georg for about three years. The fact that it lasted so long was mainly down to the TV. His family was the very first in the village to get a TV, and when that happened Manu said we should get in with him.

In the evenings we had to go to the stable – me, Martina and Manu – to fetch hay, scatter it on the floor, muck out, clean the dairy, sweep the stable, feed the pigs and what have you. After an hour Father would come and milk the cows, and only I had to stay and help with that.

Once a week we'd head out to the stable a bit early, and from there we'd sneak off and dash over to Georg's, before feeding the pigs. Once we got there we'd watch TV for half an hour with him and his sister, Steffi.

We watched lots of series – *Biene Maja*, *Wickie und die starken Männer*, *Pinocchio* and *Heidi*. We went every Tuesday, and when one series came to an end a new one always took its place.

Georg's grandfather would sit down with us and would puff away on his pipe. He always had bare feet, and would slump on the tiny couch, with his feet stretched out – he never wore socks. The three of us were forced onto the floor, with those disgusting, fetid feet between us, as there was no more room on the couch. Georg and his sister sat on chairs.

My favourite was Wickie – he was so cunning and had such good ideas. I thought that *Biene Maja* was all right too to start with, but as it went on I started finding it a bit soppy, and Willi's whiny voice got really annoying – Alexander Mouse's know-it-all voice too. Martina and Manu liked watching *Heidi* the best, but her yelling got on my nerves – she'd shriek at

every little thing! When it got to the bit where Clara begins to walk at the Alm, and so shocks Herr Sesemann and her grandmother Martina, Manu and Steffi started blubbing. Georg and I just smirked.

The one I really couldn't stand was Pinocchio. Every single week he fell for the tricks of the sly fox and the mangy cat. It pissed me off so much that I would've liked to jump into the TV and strangle all three of them.

Our parents did actually buy a TV later on, so that the guests could watch it any time they wanted. It was in the dining room. It was off limits to us, but every so often we'd creep in and watch *Knight Rider* or *Star Trek*. A lot of the time it wasn't working, though, and one of us always had to stay by the door as a lookout in any case. At the time these programmes were on we were supposed to be helping in the stable or the kitchen, because the guests had already sat down to eat.

One time, Anna and Martina sat glued to the TV for hours, watching the wedding of Prince Charles and Lady Diana. Mother finally caught them at it and chased them out, saying, 'Watching the wedding of those fancy-pants won't make you princesses – get your behinds into the kitchen!'

Conversation with therapist, January 1990

Dr B and Andreas Winter (11 years old)

I want everything to go back to the way it was!

I can't stand it anymore. At school Thommi said, 'Wow, your family's so cool with everything that's happened.'

But I don't think so – it's not cool, it's not awesome at all.

I want everything to go back to the way it was. No, go away! I just want everything to go back to the way it was!

Conversation with therapist, January 1990

Dr B and Anna Winter

This one time, someone came from Innsbruck to see how Alexander was getting on in our family. Let's see... I think he'd been with us for just under a year at that point.

Our parents weren't around – they were up at the meadow, bringing in the hay. Martina and I had been left in charge of looking after the two little ones. We were sitting on the bench at the front of the house knitting – well, I was knitting, anyway – Martina was reading, she always had to be the clever clogs. Manu and Alex were playing on their hobby horses, prancing around in front of us.

Well, all of a sudden a car pulls up in our yard and sits there, and then a man gets out and comes up to us. He asked us what our names were, and I told him. The man said to me that he had come from Innsbruck to see Alexander. Of course, I wanted to go and get Mother straight away, but the man stopped me and said that wouldn't be necessary – he just wanted to talk to us and watch us playing.

I was a bit worried at first, as we'd had it drummed into us that we shouldn't talk to strangers – apart from the guests, of course – but the man was really nice, and I thought that if he seemed that way to me, the others would think he was fine, too.

For a while I thought that he might be Alexander's real father, but I couldn't pluck up the courage to actually ask him. I was only nine, after all. He told me his name, too, but I was so excited that I forgot it straight away. He sat down beside me on the bench and we had a chat. Let me think... he asked me how old I was, which class I was in, whether Alexander was already in Kindergarten and what sorts of games we played. All the while, he was watching Alexander closely and laughing at his antics. Alexander looked really cute back then – he was wearing little Lederhosen and a checked shirt – I can still picture him now.

Then the man got up and played and talked to him. Alexander acted all shy at first and wouldn't say anything, but after a while he warmed up a bit and even took him to see the stable and the manure heap. After that, the man said goodbye, shook hands with all of us, walked back to his car and drove away.

Later, Mother said that it must have been someone from Child Protection Services wanting to check how Alexander was doing, and she was angry at me because I hadn't gone and fetched her. I hope you behaved yourselves, she said.

Consultation with therapist, January 1990

Dr Z and Alexander Sommer

I first saw a photo of my real mother when I was about ten, although at the time I didn't know that it was her. It was a good while after that, maybe two or three years later, that they told me, and that was when they gave me the photo, too.

Where was the photo? In a chest of drawers in my parents' bedroom. Me finding it was a secret, because I'd been looking through the chest of drawers for the old diaries.

The diaries weren't proper books, but more like... like old notebooks, twelve of them, all crammed with Gothic handwriting. They were written by Mother's ancestors – her mother, grandmother and great-grandmother.

Those diaries were a sacred relic for the family and all their relations – they treated them like treasure. Any holiday when the whole clan got together, they would chat about the notebooks and the stories in them.

In the fourth year at the village school we had a German lesson on Gothic script – yep, the old-style writing. We read texts in the handwriting and printed versions. I took it in my stride – I liked to read anyway. Lots of the other boys used to make fun of me because I was good at it. Reading was uncool.

Looking at the Gothic script made me think of the old diaries, which I'd always wanted to read. There's a large chest of drawers in my parents' bedroom, and Mother squirrels important things away in the bottom drawer, like their unity candle and wedding album, our baptism candles, old photos of our grandparents and other things, along with the diaries. It was all off limits to us children – we weren't even allowed to go into the room.

But no one in the family had actually read the diaries! A while back, when Mother was still young, she skimmed through one of the notebooks, but nothing more than that. She said that she already knew what was in it, because they'd been brought up on the stories. She was right. We children were always being told the stories too, first by Grandma, and later Mother herself, or our aunt.

I was crazy for those stories, especially the one about Josef Zingerle, Mother's great-grandfather – I really liked that one. Everyone went on about him all the time. The story went that he had fought alongside the rebel Andreas Hofer and had had loads of adventures. He fought at all four Battles of Bergisel, ran eleven Frenchmen and Bavarian through with his bayonet, and was fêted as a hero. When I was little he was my idea of a superhero.

Mother and Aunt Franziska really prided themselves on their great-grandfather. One New Year's Eve, Mother was a little tipsy from too much champagne and started raving to a guest about old Sepp Zingerle, her very own great-grandpa. She also boasted that she was from a dyed-in-the-wool Tyrolean family who had lived in the valley for generations, upholding the traditions, and that she was proud of it. Or something along those lines.

I wanted to learn everything I possibly could about those ancestors. Back then I used to think that if I knew absolutely everything there was to know about them, more than the others in the family, then I'd truly be one of them. And I really wanted that at the time – to properly belong. I wanted it so badly.

So I crept into the bedroom and carefully prised open the bottom drawer. At first, I had a bit of fun rummaging around in there. The old wedding photos were funny: they all looked so serious in them, as though they were at a funeral.

Then, all of a sudden, I noticed the newspaper clipping, lying at the very bottom of the drawer. A photo of a young woman was underneath the article. Someone had written the date beneath it, sometime in May '73. I read that a woman had simply vanished without a trace, and was thought to have emigrated. There was something about the photo that really drew me towards it. I don't know how to explain, but the woman seemed very familiar to me – I had a strange feeling when I first saw her face. Even so, I put the clipping back in its place and told myself that it must have been a friend of Mother's.

I took the notebooks out of the chest of drawers and hid them underneath my mattress. I couldn't risk anyone finding out what I'd done. During the night, when Manu was sleeping, I'd slide them out and read them by torchlight. At first it took me a while to decipher the handwriting, but once I got started I soon picked up speed.

During the daytime I would look forward to the night, when I would be able to read. That didn't last long, though. The diaries turned out to be a massive disappointment, a total let-down...

The women droned on and on about the tiniest detail of their everyday lives. I was only ten, so unsurprisingly I wanted to read about something more exciting than sick children or pressing cabbage or how long and hard the winter is or who's died in childbirth this time. They moaned constantly about their husbands and went on about their dear Lord God, imploring Him to help them – their prayers went on for pages. I wanted to get to the bits about the heroic deeds, what it was like to tackle the French with a pitchfork or a bayonet, and what Andreas Hofer was like in the flesh.

But there was nothing about that in there at all. The only mentions of Sepp Zingerle were complaints about what a rubbish husband he was. About how he drank so much – he was a total pisshead – and raped and beat his wife, and the children too. His wife was called Marie and she had thirteen children, but only six of them survived. Sepp didn't fight at all four Battles of Bergisel, but only the first and the third. He got so drunk that he missed the start of the second battle, and by the time the fourth battle came round he was so cowardly that he just skived off. He didn't kill eleven Frenchmen and Bavarians, either – his wife only mentioned the one. And she was stuck doing most of the work at home on the farm, as he was almost never there.

I was gutted. After all, this was the hero that I'd idolised for years. Of course, a couple of years later I could look back and find the whole thing funny.

One year, at Aunt Franziska's birthday celebration, everyone began spouting the old yarns about brave old Sepp Zingerle. I whispered in Manu's ear that he preferred battering his wife to beating the French, and she went and said it out loud. Mother looked so... so dumbfounded, I suppose, and sent us to our room.

But Father smirked – I do remember that.

This sample translation was commissioned by *New Books in German*.

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nbg@london.goethe.org