

Nietzsche

Oh, poor Dad. I'm sorry I made fun of you.
Now I'm spelling Nietzsche wrong, too.

What You Learn About the Baby

IDLE

You learn how to be idle, how to do nothing. That is the new thing in your life—to do nothing. To do nothing and not be impatient about doing nothing. It is easy to do nothing and become impatient. It is not easy to do nothing and not mind it, not mind the hours passing, the hours of the morning passing and then the hours of the afternoon, and one day passing and the next passing, while you do nothing.

WHAT YOU CAN COUNT ON

You learn never to count on anything being the same from day to day, that he will fall asleep at a certain hour, or sleep for a certain length of time. Some days he sleeps for several hours at a stretch, other days he sleeps no more than half an hour.

Sometimes he will wake suddenly, crying hard, when you were prepared to go on working for another hour. Now you prepare to

stop. But as it takes you a few minutes to end your work for the day, and you cannot go to him immediately, he stops crying and continues quiet. Now, though you have prepared to end work for the day, you prepare to resume working.

DON'T EXPECT TO FINISH ANYTHING

You learn never to expect to finish anything. For example, the baby is staring at a red ball. You are cleaning some large radishes. The baby will begin to fuss when you have cleaned four and there are eight left to clean.

YOU WILL NOT KNOW WHAT IS WRONG

The baby is on his back in his cradle crying. His legs are slightly lifted from the surface of his mattress in the effort of his crying. His head is so heavy and his legs so light and his muscles so hard that his legs fly up easily from the mattress when he tenses, as now.

Often, you will wonder what is wrong, why he is crying, and it would help, it would save you much disturbance, to know what is wrong, whether he is hungry, or tired, or bored, or cold, or hot, or uncomfortable in his clothes, or in pain in his stomach or bowels. But you will not know, or not when it would help to know, at the time, but only later, when you have guessed correctly or many times incorrectly. And it will not help to know afterward, or it will not help unless you have learned from the experience to identify a particular cry that means hunger, or pain, etc. But the memory of a cry is a difficult one to fix in your mind.

WHAT EXHAUSTS YOU

You must think and feel for him as well as for yourself—that he is tired, or bored, or uncomfortable.

SITTING STILL

You learn to sit still. You learn to stare as he stares, to stare up at the rafters as long as he stares up at the rafters, sitting still in a large space.

ENTERTAINMENT

For him, though not usually for you, merely to look at a thing is an entertainment.

Then, there are some things that not just you, and not just he, but both of you like to do, such as lie in the hammock, or take a walk, or take a bath.

RENUNCIATION

You give up, or postpone, for his sake, many of the pleasures you once enjoyed, such as eating meals when you are hungry, eating as much as you want, watching a movie all the way through from beginning to end, reading as much of a book as you want to at one sitting, going to sleep when you are tired, sleeping until you have had enough sleep.

You look forward to a party as you never used to look forward to a party, now that you are at home alone with him so much. But at this party you will not be able to talk to anyone for more than a few minutes, because he cries so constantly, and in the end he will be your only company, in a back bedroom.

QUESTIONS

How do his eyes know to seek out your eyes? How does his mouth know it is a mouth, when it imitates yours?

HIS PERCEPTIONS

You learn from reading it in a book that he recognizes you not by the appearance of your face but by your smell and the way you hold him, that he focuses clearly on an object only when it is held a certain dis-

tance from him, and that he can see only in shades of gray. Even what is white or black to you is only a shade of gray to him.

THE DIFFICULTY OF A SHADOW

He reaches to grasp the shadow of his spoon, but the shadow reappears on the back of his hand.

HIS SOUNDS

You discover that he makes many sounds in his throat to accompany what is happening to him: sounds in the form of grunts, air expelled in small gusts. Then sometimes high squeaks, and then sometimes, when he has learned to smile at you, high coos.

PRIORITY

It should be very simple: while he is awake, you care for him. As soon as he goes to sleep, you do the most important thing you have to do, and do it as long as you can, either until it is done or until he wakes up. If he wakes up before it is done, you care for him until he sleeps again, and then you continue to work on the most important thing. In this way, you should learn to recognize which thing is the most important and to work on it as soon as you have the opportunity.

ODD THINGS YOU NOTICE ABOUT HIM

The dark gray lint that collects in the lines of his palm.

The white fuzz that collects in his armpit.

The black under the tips of his fingernails. You have let his nails get too long, because it is hard to make a precise cut on such a small thing constantly moving. Now it would take a very small nailbrush to clean them.

The colors of his face: his pink forehead, his bluish eyelids, his reddish-gold eyebrows. And the tiny beads of sweat standing out from the tiny pores of his skin.

When he yawns, how the wings of his nostrils turn yellow.

When he holds his breath and pushes down on his diaphragm, how quickly his face turns red.

His uneven breath: how his breath changes in response to his motion, and to his curiosity.

How his bent arms and legs, when he is asleep on his stomach, take the shape of an hourglass.

When he lies against your chest, how he lifts his head to look around like a turtle and drops it again because it is so heavy.

How his hands move slowly through the air like crabs or other sea creatures before closing on a toy.

How, bottom up, folded, he looks as though he were going away, or as though he were upside down.

CONNECTED BY A SINGLE NIPPLE

You are lying on the bed nursing him, but you are not holding on to him with your arms or hands and he is not holding on to you. He is connected to you by a single nipple.

DISORDER

You learn that there is less order in your life now. Or if there is to be order, you must work hard at maintaining it. For instance, it is evening and you are lying on the bed with the baby half asleep beside you. You are watching *Gaslight*. Suddenly a thunderstorm breaks and the rain comes down hard. You remember the baby's clothes out on the line, and you get up from the bed and run outdoors. The baby begins crying at being left so abruptly half asleep on the bed. *Gaslight* continues, the baby screams now, and you are out in the hard rainfall in your white bathrobe.

PROTOCOL

There are so many occasions for greetings in the course of his day. Upon each waking, a greeting. Each time you enter the room, a greeting. And in each greeting there is real enthusiasm.

DISTRACTION

You decide you must attend some public event, say a concert, despite the difficulty of arranging such a thing. You make elaborate preparations to leave the baby with a babysitter, taking a bag full of equipment, a folding bed, a folding stroller, and so on. Now, as the concert proceeds, you sit thinking not about the concert but only about the elaborate preparations and whether they have been adequate, and no matter how often you try to listen to the concert, you will hear only a few minutes of it before thinking again about those elaborate preparations and whether they have been adequate to the comfort of the baby and the convenience of the babysitter.

HENRI BERGSON

He demonstrates to you what you learned long ago from reading Henri Bergson—that laughter is always preceded by surprise.

YOU DO NOT KNOW WHEN HE WILL FALL ASLEEP

If his eyes are wide open staring at a light, it does not mean that he will not be asleep within minutes.

If he cries with a squeaky cry and squirms with wiry strength against your chest, digging his sharp little fingernails into your shoulder, or raking your neck, or pushing his face into your shirt, it does not mean he will not relax in five minutes and grow heavy. But five minutes is a very long time when you are caring for a baby.

WHAT RESEMBLES HIS CRY

Listening for his cry, you mistake, for his cry, the wind, seagulls, and police sirens.

TIME

It is not that five minutes is always a very long time when you are caring for a baby but that time passes very slowly when you are waiting

for a baby to go to sleep, when you are listening to him cry alone in his bed or whimper close to your ear.

Then time passes very quickly once the baby is asleep. The things you have to do have always taken this long to do, but before the baby was born it did not matter, because there were many such hours in the day to do these things. Now there is only one hour, and again later, on some days, one hour, and again, very late in the day, on some days, one last hour.

ORDER

You cannot think clearly or remain calm in such disorder. And so you learn to wash a dish as soon as you use it, otherwise it may not be washed for a very long time. You learn to make your bed immediately because there may be no time to do it later. And then you begin to worry regularly, if not constantly, about how to save time. You learn to prepare for the baby's waking as soon as the baby sleeps. You learn to prepare everything hours in advance. Then your conception of time begins to change. The future collapses into the present.

OTHER DAYS

There are other days, despite what you have learned about saving time, and preparing ahead, when something in you relaxes, or you are simply tired. You do not mind if the house is untidy. You do not mind if you do nothing but care for the baby. You do not mind if time goes by while you lie in the hammock and read a magazine.

WHY HE SMILES

He looks at a window with serious interest. He looks at a painting and smiles. It is hard to know what that smile means. Is he pleased by the painting? Is the painting funny to him? No, soon you understand that he smiles at the painting for the same reason he smiles at you: because the painting is looking at him.

A PROBLEM OF BALANCE

A problem of balance: if he yawns, he falls over backward.

MOVING FORWARD

You worry about moving forward, or about the difference between moving forward and staying in one place. You begin to notice which things have to be done over and over again in one day, and which things have to be done once every day, and which things have to be done every few days, and so on, and all these things only cause you to mark time, stay in one place, rather than move forward, or, rather, keep you from slipping backward, whereas certain other things are done only once. A job to earn money is done only once, a letter is written saying a thing only once and never again, an event is planned that will happen only once, news is received or news passed along only once, and if, in this way, something happens that will happen only once, this day is different from other days, and on this day your life seems to move forward, and it is easier to sit still holding the baby and staring at the wall knowing that on this day, at least, your life has moved forward; there has been a change, however small.

A SMALL THING WITH ANOTHER THING, EVEN SMALLER

Asleep in his carriage, he is woken by a fly.

PATIENCE

You try to understand why on some days you have no patience and on others your patience is limitless and you will stand over him for a long time where he lies on his back waving his arms, kicking his legs, or looking up at the painting on the wall. Why on some days it is limitless and on others, or at other times, late in a day when you have been patient, you cannot bear his crying and want to threaten to put him away in his bed to cry alone if he does not stop crying in your arms, and sometimes you do put him away in his bed to cry alone.

IMPATIENCE

You learn about patience. You discover patience. Or you discover how patience extends up to a certain point and then it ends and impatience begins. Or rather, impatience was there all along, underneath a light, surface kind of patience, and at a certain point the light kind of patience wears away and all that's left is the impatience. Then the impatience grows.

PARADOX

You begin to understand paradox: lying on the bed next to him, you are deeply interested, watching his face and holding his hands, and yet at the same time you are deeply bored, wishing you were somewhere else doing something else.

REGRESSION

Although he is at such an early stage in his development, he regresses, when he is hungry or tired, to an earlier stage, still, of non-communication, self-absorption, and spastic motion.

BETWEEN HUMAN AND ANIMAL

How he is somewhere between human and animal. While he can't see well, while he looks blindly toward the brightest light, and can't see you, or can't see your features but more clearly the edge of your face, the edge of your head; and while his movements are more chaotic; and while he is more subject to the needs of his body, and can't be distracted, by intellectual curiosity, from his hunger or loneliness or exhaustion, then he seems to you more animal than human.

HOW PARTS OF HIM ARE NOT CONNECTED

He does not know what his hand is doing: it curls around the iron rod of your chair and holds it fast. Then, while he is looking elsewhere, it curls around the narrow black foot of a strange frog.

ADMIRATION

He is filled with such courage, goodwill, curiosity, and self-reliance that you admire him for it. But then you realize he was born with these qualities: now what do you do with your admiration?

RESPONSIBILITY

How responsible he is, to the limits of his capacity, for his own body, for his own safety. He holds his breath when a cloth covers his face. He widens his eyes in the dark. When he loses his balance, his hands curl around whatever comes under them, and he clutches the stuff of your shirt.

WITHIN HIS LIMITS

How he is curious, to the limits of his understanding; how he attempts to approach what arouses his curiosity, to the limits of his motion; how confident he is, to the limits of his knowledge; how masterful he is, to the limits of his competence; how he derives satisfaction from another face before him, to the limits of his attention; how he asserts his needs, to the limits of his force.

Her Mother's Mother

1.

There are times when she is gentle, but there are also times when she is not gentle, when she is fierce and unrelenting toward him or them all, and she knows it is the strange spirit of her mother in her then. For there were times when her mother was gentle, but there were also times when she was fierce and unrelenting toward her or them all, and she knows it was the spirit of her mother's mother in her mother then. For her mother's mother had been gentle sometimes, her mother said, and teased her or them all, but she had also been fierce and unrelenting, and accused her of lying, and perhaps them all.

2.

In the night, late at night, her mother's mother used to weep and implore her husband, as her mother, still a girl, lay in bed listening. Her mother, when she was grown, did not weep and implore her hus-