

Excerpt from

Transference

By

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Cast of Characters

<u>Sigmund Freud</u>	Middle-aged. Has the authority of one who's taken on the world and won, sort of.
<u>Carl Gustav Jung</u>	A few years younger than Freud, still gestating. Brilliant, seductive, passionate, un-balanced.
<u>Sabina Spielrein</u>	An hysteric possessed of haunting beauty and imagination. Russian born, ages from childhood to 50.

Scene

Freud's consulting room at 19 Berggasse, Vienna; the Burghölzli Clinic, Zurich; lecture halls in Moscow and Boston; Sabina's childhood home, Rostov-on-the-Don; her Vienna apartment; a ship in New York harbor; a Pueblo Indian reservation in New Mexico; King Arthur's Britain; Freud's house in London; Jung's castle at Bollingen.

Time

1904-1941

Notes

Transference is a work of historical fiction. The relationships roughly parallel historical accounts, but biographical and chronological accuracy has been sacrificed to serve dramatic intent.

Accents: Freud and Jung speak standard English. Sabina does not. Her pronunciation marks her as eastern European. She should have nothing like a full Russian accent, but just enough of a lilt to set her apart vocally from the two men.

Set: Scenes flow into one another like water. The actors make instantaneous transformations in time, place, and into fairy tale characters, which may be portrayed with puppets. Two chairs, a bench and a lectern can suffice to furnish the various locations. The fairy tale world should be isolated from the body of the action by some means such as a scrim, platform or pool of light.

ACT I

SETTING: A bare stage with two simple, upright chairs in the foreground, a lectern to the side. The chairs are of wood, as close to period as possible. Upstage, a translucent screen or scrim with a similar chair behind.

AT RISE: No LIGHT change as SABINA, middle aged, approaches the lectern to address the audience. SHE wears a fashionable overcoat, circa 1940. If necessary to quiet the house SHE taps the lectern with a pencil. SOUND of artillery fire in the distance, almost imperceptible.

SABINA

(harried)

I'm sorry to be late, I'm used to the bus and I misjudged the walk. I thank the members of the Moscow Academy for braving the weather and coming this morning. As you can see we've lost our heat, but I thought we might push on as best we can under the...circumstances. Sometimes I go about pitying myself. Sometimes I think I'm being carried by great wings across the sky.

(beat)

As you know, we usually begin with a talk. I see no reason to abandon the practice today because the world's gone mad. Have you ever had the feeling that all you've achieved somehow doesn't count unless you can face up to one final task? At first I thought this had to do with prevailing against brute power, something much on our minds. I confess I don't know much about power and I've never cared for it.

(SHE sips water.)

Inside this glass are seven oceans.

(beat)

All this upheaval turns my thinking toward power's opposite-- I wonder more about love, and its cousin forgiveness. Not an easy road to walk, to be sure. In fact a dark wood. Well. Love. Where to begin?

A sudden CROSSFADE to semi-dark. SOUND: Music having the feel of the opening theme from Rimsky-Korsakov's Scheherazade. SABINA walks behind the scrim where, BACKLIT, she sheds 30 years and her overcoat. SHE is naked underneath. SHE strikes a languorous pose, as if emerging from her bath. SHE wraps a towel around her shoulders, contemplating her reflection in a mirror. A light reveals FREUD in his consulting room downstage.

JUNG stands apart in his own LIGHT,
looking at the scrim.

FREUD

The way these women manage to charm us with every conceivable psychic perfection until they have attained their purpose is one of nature's greatest spectacles.

(MUSIC fades. BACKLIGHTING
fades.)

JUNG

Dear Professor Freud. I have been under terrific strain. A complex is playing havoc with me. A woman patient has violated my confidence in the most mortifying way. I have always acted the gentleman, but before the bar of my rather too sensitive conscience I nevertheless don't feel clean. I need hardly say that I've made a complete break, I assure you. The few nervous symptoms that appeared are now resolving; they are hardly worth mentioning. I can yet barely see with clarity, but a line from Shakespeare touches the crux of it: "Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale her infinite variety. Other women cloy the appetites they feed, but she makes hungry where most she satisfies." Diabolical, isn't it? Jung.

FREUD

I never got anywhere I didn't find a poet who had arrived first.

(CROSSFADE to:)

1908. FREUD'S consulting room, as before. SABINA puts an inexpensive coat, and enters from upstage. JUNG moves behind the screen.

SABINA

Herr Professor! It is a great honor.

FREUD

Fraulein Spielrein. Shall I take your coat?

SABINA

No, it's cold. Thank you for seeing me.

FREUD

My door is open to all my colleagues.

SABINA

I'm hardly that.

FREUD

You've finished your studies?

SABINA

Just this month. I still have examinations.

FREUD

And then...

SABINA

I...it's up in the air. I'm keeping my flat in Zurich. But Vienna... is the home of psychoanalysis.

FREUD

You are quite infatuated with my fledging child?
(meaning, psychoanalysis)

SABINA

I'm determined to be an analyst, yes.

FREUD

Well, good.

(beat)

I must admit your letter aroused my curiosity. And now that I meet the charming author, I am all ears.

(A LIGHT on JUNG behind the screen. FREUD does not hear his conversation with SABINA.)

JUNG

Sabina! Where are you now?

SABINA

In his study.

JUNG

My God! Sabina, what do you hope to accomplish? You can't betray me!

SABINA

I have to make sense of things!

FREUD

Do you want to tell me about it?

SABINA

What?

FREUD

Your letter. You said it concerned something of the greatest importance that would be of interest to me.

(JUNG crosses to SABINA. HE begins making love to HER, reaching under her coat.)

FREUD does not see or hear
HIM. During the rest of the
scene, SHE grows more
aroused.)

SABINA

Yes. It concerns...Professor Jung.

FREUD

Ah.

JUNG

You think you can deceive him the way you did me? He won't
even understand you!

FREUD

Of course you knew him in Zurich.

SABINA

He was my analyst.

JUNG

Our bond is...sacred, Sabina. We contain multitudes.

FREUD

You don't say.

SABINA

I...was his first patient.

FREUD

This is intriguing.

SABINA

Not his first mental patient. The first on whom he...used
your techniques.

JUNG

We are different from others! Never forget!

FREUD

So your case is... of clinical interest. Was the analysis
successful, in your opinion?

SABINA

Oh, yes. I'm completely cured. I-- Oh!

FREUD

Yes?

(SHE has an orgasm. Loudly.
JUNG backs away.)

My God! Are you all right?

SABINA

Yes. Fine. I must sit.

FREUD

Of course. What an oaf! I should have offered you a chair.

(SHE sits.)

Would you like some water?

SABINA

No thank you. Herr Professor. I must go now.

FREUD

But the reason for your visit--

SABINA

Another time. It is a great honor.

(FREUD offers his hand. SHE barely takes it, then stumbles behind the scrim, finding LIGHT.

Professor Jung! Carl Gustav! I know you can hear me. Do you want me to lose my mind again? I have never been so humiliated!

(CROSSFADE to:)

FREUD and JUNG in FREUD'S consulting room. Their tone is collegial.

JUNG

I have learned an unspeakable amount of marital wisdom.

FREUD

Don't be so hard on yourself. Such experiences are unavoidable.

JUNG

Well, she was my test case, so to speak. I prolonged the relationship because I thought she would relapse.

FREUD

A most attractive woman. I myself have had a narrow escape or two.

JUNG

This is how she repays me.

FREUD

I affected ignorance of the entire matter.

JUNG

She'll be back. She admires you boundlessly. If I am lost to her then you are the obvious choice.

FREUD

We shall see. Meanwhile it does not affect us. There is no stain on our movement.

JUNG

The scales have fallen from my eyes. What was I thinking?

FREUD

The transference does not occur at the level of thought.

JUNG

It was more than transference. It was a spell. Thank God I am in your study with you once again.

FREUD

Tush. You exaggerate, my friend, as usual.

JUNG

You don't know her.

FREUD

Did you tell her your feelings?

(JUNG is silent.)

Did you tell her your feelings?

SABINA

Carl Gustav? I know you can hear me.

(FREUD does not hear HER; JUNG does, and is terrified.)

SOUND: Sabina's theme again, faint, continuing through the end of the scene.)

JUNG

Of course I told her! How could I not? She reads my mind.

FREUD

Thoughts do not travel through the air.

JUNG

Yes. I forgot.

FREUD

She was psychotic.

SABINA

So? Was I? You called me a poet!

JUNG

She was florid. But that was just the first summer, when she came to the Burghölzli. Then she remitted.

JUNG(cont'd)
In a year she resumed her studies at the medical school. She decided to be an analyst. I was flattered.

FREUD
A patient's gratitude--

JUNG
It was more than gratitude that propelled her. It was brilliance.

FREUD
Brilliance?

SABINA
(sarcastic)
Yes, Carl. Flatter me again!

JUNG
In my ten years of psychiatry I've encountered two minds I stand in awe of. Yours first. Then hers. There is no third.

(beat)

FREUD
Shall we walk? Tell me. From the start.

(THEY go out. SOUND: Sabina's theme fades. CROSSFADE to:)

A garden at the Burghölzli Clinic, Zurich, 1904. SOUND: bird song. SABINA enters in a hospital gown, sits. SOUND: The birds grow menacing. Bees buzz. SHE twitches, rotates her head, scratches herself involuntarily, sticks out her tongue.

SABINA
Stop it. Stop this arguing. Stop it! I draw the circle! I shit on you. I SHIT ON YOU!
(JUNG enters.)

JUNG
Fraulein--

SABINA
(to voices)
Who shall penetrate the magic fire?
(to JUNG)
Yes?

JUNG
I'm Dr. Jung.

SABINA
So?

JUNG
Who is arguing?

SABINA
What do you mean?

JUNG
You just said, "Stop this arguing?"

SABINA
I did?

JUNG
Yes. Perhaps it was the doctors, the other patients?

SABINA
(to voices)
WILL YOU STOP BEING SO TIRESOME?

JUNG
I'm sorry.
(SOUND: voices fade. SABINA
gradually becomes more
normal.)

SABINA
Oh! I'm not myself. You're Dr. Jung? They said you were
coming. This was not the impression I'd hoped to make.

JUNG
You hoped to make an impression?

SABINA
Dr. Jung's association experiment is known throughout Europe.

JUNG
So you're a follower of psychiatry?

SABINA
I was a medical student. Before my parents brought me here.

JUNG
Well, I should say that I'm the one who needs to make an
impression. Do I meet your expectation?

SABINA
That remains to be seen.

JUNG
Good. What did you mean, you draw the circle?

SABINA

It's a...superstition. Like cross my heart.

JUNG

You said something about fire.

SABINA

Did I? It's nothing... a fairy tale.

JUNG

I'm afraid I'm ignorant of such matters.

SABINA

This is the impression you wish to make?

JUNG

I can learn.

SABINA

Brunhilde draws a circle of magic fire to protect herself.
Only Sigfried can reach her.

JUNG

So you...recall the tale.

SABINA

No. I enact it.

JUNG

For your amusement?

SABINA

For my life.

(Pause. JUNG is stopped cold
by her answer.)

JUNG

I'm told you came with your family from Russia.

SABINA

From Rostov-on-the-Don.

JUNG

And you came to Zurich to study medicine?

SABINA

My studies have been interrupted.

JUNG

What interrupted them?

SABINA

(furtive)

I saw what people were doing. Underneath their gowns.

JUNG

And what is that?

SABINA

It's disgusting. I don't know what you'll think of me.

JUNG

Between doctor and patient, there is no disgust. There is only a sacred bond. Without judgment.

SABINA whispers to JUNG. CROSSFADE to:

SABINA strides to the lectern. SHE has aged, and again speaks without accent.

SABINA

So. Love, and perhaps forgiveness. What to say? I've been around and around and am quite lost. Whenever I'm lost I look for a story to shed light, perhaps a fairy tale which calls to me. In my youth, I had a penchant for the Germanic hero Sigfried, who released his love from a circle of magic fire. Romance as rescue! Simple. Straightforward. Irresistible. But life has many layers. And there is a love story at King Arthur's court which has always seemed more evocative to me. I don't know why. It begins as a story about Arthur, but isn't really about Arthur at all. How like life to lead us off in one direction and then strike from behind.

(Her tone changes to storyteller, as if her audience were a group of children.)

It begins: once upon a time, it seemed there was a foul and dark Knight

(LIGHTS reveal JUNG, appearing as the Dark Knight.)

terrorizing Britian.

(FREUD takes the part of Arthur. HE appears with a sword.)

FREUD

Come out, accursed Knight. I command you.

JUNG

Is that the famous King Arthur? Does he hold in his hand the sword Excalibur? Come, courageous king! I have been waiting.