

Sample translation from

Lukas Hartmann

Into the Unknown
(Ins Unbekannte)

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I

Arrival, Burghölzli psychiatric hospital, Zurich, 1905

So where was she? She wasn't entirely sure. Her parents had made her undertake this long journey, especially her over-anxious mother; her father stayed silent and avoided looking her in the eye. He had a bad conscience, and for good reason. She wasn't a child any longer, she was a young woman. He shouldn't have been so harsh with her – when she was younger, he would never have been allowed to take a rod to her bare backside, with her brother looking on. Afterwards, she had to hide herself from them, creep away to somewhere inside herself, and when they tried to tempt her out, she resisted with all her might, screaming, lashing out, no matter whether someone was touching her gently or roughly. They took her to see doctors while they were still in Rostov, pushed her into white-walled rooms; she heard her mother weeping, her father breathing heavily. They laid her on a couch, several hands holding her, she pushed them away, they strapped her down, faces above her, unfamiliar faces that she wanted to scare off, and she laughed at them all, a deliberately shrill and theatrical laugh, and they took it for a symptom of her illness – yes, her, the girl who wanted to become a doctor, who – to her mother's horror – had cut open sick dolls and sewed them back together. Then relatives advised the family to travel, to go somewhere far away, where medicine was more advanced than it was in Russia, to a Swiss hospital where they

took care of your soul as well as your body, her mother said, and she was a dentist herself. Sabina spoke fluent German, but the place they were going to now in the hired coach was called Burghölzli, she didn't understand the word, and because it sounded so droll, she acquiesced and allowed them to walk her into the rather forbidding building.

"I won't swallow anything, or drink anything," she said very loudly. "And I don't want any injections."

"Dear God," her mother sighed, taking Sabina by the hand, "they're not going to torture you, child."

But Sabina shook off the hand, slid right to the end of the padded bench, closed her eyes and pretended she had just fallen asleep. Then she felt another hand on her shoulder, the pressure much too heavy, and familiar: it was her father's. She gave a start and screamed: "Leave me alone!" The weight vanished, it fell from her like a dead thing, slack, and she laughed loudly – hysterically they called it, she knew that. Should she miaow like an angry cat? She did it, and heard her mother's drawn-out sigh. Nothing from her father. A door opened and Sabina felt herself being forced out of her seat: a stocky nurse in a white uniform with a white cap had joined them, she was stronger than Sabina and pushed her forwards into a room. Everything white, pitilessly white. The patient was made to sit on a hard-backed chair. There was leather against her back, she didn't like that, leather came from animals.

"I want to sit somewhere else," she whined. "Do you understand? Somewhere else!"

She began to sob noisily; now I've run through my whole repertoire, she thought. Or had she? She slid off the chair and threw herself to the floor. It was harder than the back of the chair, but she paid no attention to that and let out a loud laugh. Two other nurses had now arrived, and together they tried to restrain the patient. Sabina fought back with a strength she hadn't known she possessed. Together, the nurses got her back into the chair, and someone tried to strap her to it. Now even her father was helping them, and that was despicable. She writhed, she screamed.

"We're not going to hurt you," she heard them saying, in several variations.

She played the piano; she liked variations, and she laughed again. But now her arms were bound to her body.

"That's not true, you *are* hurting me," she complained, exaggerating the pain.

"Please stop," her father said in the background, just as she had wanted him to. But, as usual, no one listened to him. It was only in her childhood that his word had been law.

"What are you doing there?" she suddenly heard a gentle, male voice saying.

Someone had entered the room without making a sound.

"Untie her," said the man.

An awkward silence, but they obeyed. Sabina was deliberately breathing hard, panting, and in any case she really was exhausted

now. She squinted into the light; the man standing in front of her seemed oversized, and he was wearing a white coat, too. A doctor, evidently, though still young. She'd had enough of people like him recently. But he had a kind face, with eyes that were an indeterminate colour. Light blue? More greyish. *Grau* was grey and *Grauen* was horror – it made her laugh: she had an excellent command of the German language, and had been admired for it at school. He hesitated, smiled – she noticed that. He was a handsome man, with a dignity unusual for his age.

“What is the colour of your eyes?” she asked, which seemed to amuse him even more.

“Why does that interest you?” he asked in return, narrowing his eyes to slits.

“Just because,” she said.

“I’m certain you will find out,” he replied, more in jest than in earnest. “I’m your doctor, you see, assigned to you. My name is Jung. Doctor Jung.”

That tickled her so much she burst out laughing again. “I was just thinking you were very young for a doctor. And now that’s your name, too.” His laugh was less melodious than hers, a little strained, she thought. Around them, everything was quiet, scarcely a noise to be heard apart from the conversation between the two of them.

“I’m probably older than you think,” he said, sounding serious now, even a little offended, it seemed to her.

“Are you married?” she asked, and was pleased to see his irritation at this, the slight quiver at the corners of his mouth. Now she noticed that he was wearing a pair of rimless spectacles, which made him look older, and a thin moustache that didn’t suit him.

“Yes, I am, Fräulein Spielrein. But I’ll ask the questions here, and I would appreciate your cooperation with that.”

She pretended not to understand. She half sat up. “And is your wife expecting?”

He fell silent, biding his time as he studied her; the nurses hardly dared to breathe; only one of them, the youngest, made a noise that sounded like a suppressed laugh.

Sabina sank back into the chair, murmuring something; the words she produced grew louder but remained unintelligible, then she began to raise and lower her body in an ever faster rhythm. Doctor Jung gestured to one of the nurses, who laid a hand on Sabina’s belly, and that calmed her at once. It was only recently that she had found out how babies were made; her mother had kept it from her for far too long, and Sabina had come up with her own theories, all of which she subsequently abandoned. For a time she had been convinced that a baby was made in the mother’s thigh, which was a very inviting part of the body on many women, and was then cut out. In a medical book, hidden behind some others on her parents’ bookshelves – cunningly concealed in the geography section, rather than biology – she had found the answer. She’d had an inkling, partly from the hints her classmates had dropped, but she had been horrified by the idea of what happened during “copulation”

between a man and a woman. It was also clear that her brothers had known for a long time. She confronted her mother about it, and the latter hung her head and gave her the excuse that one had to spare a young woman from these things for as long as possible. Sabina, who had already started menstruating, didn't agree, and refused to speak to her mother for two full weeks; her father stayed out of these things in any case, although when she had been impertinent, he had beaten her on her bare behind, which had nothing whatever to do with conception.

She imagined Doctor Jung lying on top of his wife and penetrating her, because that was apparently necessary for the act of conception, and groaned defensively as she did so.

Looking concerned, the younger nurse felt her pulse, and Doctor Jung asked if she wasn't feeling well. But Sabina calmed herself.

"It's nothing," she said in a clear voice. "Nothing at all."

"We'll see one another again tomorrow morning," the doctor informed her before he left. "From now on, we'll meet every day at eleven. I would ask you to ensure you are ready at this time to be taken to my room for a consultation." Then he got up and left the room without a handshake or any other sign, and, to her own amazement, Sabina suddenly felt abandoned, although she was still flanked by her parents. She was disappointed; she would have liked to keep challenging the doctor. It was something an obedient young lady should not do, and it was for that reason that she did it; she couldn't escape the urge.

“Doctor Jung,” she announced, having fully regained her composure, “would doubtless have advised me what to do for persistent constipation.” She loved the long words she had put together here, “persistent” and “constipation,” with all their different vowel sounds, they sounded foreign and alluring, quite unlike “rain” or “broom”. For a moment, those present in the consulting room seemed to be holding their breath.

“I don’t like it,” Sabina went on, paying no heed to her mother’s reproachful whisper, “when I cannot go the lavatory” – another of those long words. She looked defiantly at the other people in the room. “Or would you prefer me to talk about shit?” She had learned the German word *Scheiße* from a classmate in Rostov, who liked coarse expressions; it was not part of the family vocabulary, but everyone knew what it meant. It was a custom in the Spielrein household, encouraged by their mother, that every day at table they would practise a different language. On Tuesdays, it was German. Sabina let out a laugh and pulled up her legs, revealing her stockings to above the knee, and her mother tugged her skirt back over them as far as it would go. “Leave me alone,” Sabina hissed, writhing in the chair and then laughing again. She didn’t yet know whether Doctor Jung would use force against her, but she liked to imagine her fierce resistance; his hands were unusually large, almost coarse.

“That’s enough,” the eldest of the three nurses put in, before turning to her mother, whose red face bore witness to her embarrassment. “We’ll take Fräulein Spielrein to a single room now, where she can calm down. She will stay here in the main

building for the duration of the consultation; I'll arrange things with the doctor."

"We've got a suitcase of clothes for her," her mother hurried to point out, as her father nodded gravely.

"She'll be given hospital clothing," the youngest nurse said, with a touch of schadenfreude.

Sabina gave a start, her body stiffened and she made a noise that sounded like a cry of horror. "You didn't tell me that! You're hypocrites! You just want to be rid of me!"

Her mother shook her head guiltily. "There's often no getting through to you these days, Sabina."

"If you behave properly, Fräulein Spielrein," the nurse in charge put in, "we'll treat you properly, too. Please do as we tell you."

"Call the doctor," Sabina said indignantly, "I want him to tell me himself."

But no one was listening to her panting and her protests any longer; her father had turned to face the wall, so that he would witness no more of his daughter's humiliation. Now the four of them surrounded the chair, lifted Sabina out of it with a practised, professional technique as she resisted, and led – no, carried – her out of the door. Sabina screamed one final time on her way to her room, wild and triumphant. She didn't know where the triumph came from, but it was there, hot and overwhelming.

Lukas Hartmann, *Into the Unknown*

Zurich, Sabina at the Burghölzli Hospital

That night she slept for a long time, though once she woke with a start and screamed, feeling threatened by a shadowy figure and fearing that her guts had turned red. The night nurse came running – it was the young one again – but she sent her back to the guardroom, as it was called here. In the morning, breakfast was brought in. She didn't eat black bread, she said sharply. The nurse removed the tray without a word, but came back and laid a dress on the bed with that trace of *schadenfreude* in her smile once more; the greyish white institutional clothing was what you had to wear here, she told the patient.

“I won't,” Sabina snapped back at her. “That coarse material will scratch me, I know that already, and then my skin will turn bright red.” She laughed loudly, then puffed out her cheeks and held her breath until her face reddened.

The nurse – or was she a warder? – suppressed a laugh and said: “You can keep your underclothes on, you know.”

“But I don't want to,” Sabina retorted. “I like to feel soft fabric against my tormented skin.”

“Tormented?” the nurse seemed confused. “Why tormented?”

“Because the world torments me, my dear child,” Sabina replied. “Does it not torment you?” She pulled the nightshirt that her

mother had brought for her up over her head and stood naked before the nurse – she knew she had beautiful breasts. “And what is your name, my child?”

The nurse lowered her head in embarrassment and stammered: “That isn’t allowed.” She was close to tears. But still she added in a scarcely audible voice: “Very well, my name is Johanna.”

Sabina suddenly felt a deep sympathy for her. “It’s alright, Johanna,” she comforted the nurse, who she was sure was poorly educated. “I’ll do as you wish.” With that, she took the hospital clothing from the bed and pulled it over her head, pushed her arms into the sleeves, shook herself until the fabric fell into place over her bare skin, reaching almost to the floor. She twirled for the nurse, making the hem of the dress lift a little. “Now, how do I look, my dear Johanna?”

The girl – she was still a girl, really – seemed extremely embarrassed and said nothing. “I will go to see Doctor Jung like this and ask him how becoming he finds this attire.”

“I don’t know about that, Fräulein Spielrein. But he will instruct you to wear a petticoat.” She was actually smiling now, in a mischievous way, it seemed to Sabina.

“Do you think, then,” she asked, “he will notice that I am not wearing one? I mean, the neck of this dress is as high as it could possibly be, it’s almost choking me.” That wasn’t true, of course, but it coaxed a little cackle of laughter out of Johanna, and Sabina

sat down with dignity on the wooden chair, one of two that furnished the room.

“I’ll bring you a cup of tea, Fräulein,” said Johanna. “You do need to drink something.”

Sabina shook her head. “I really only drink champagne.”

Johanna seemed lost for words.

Sabina laughed loudly. “Now I’ve bamboozled you, haven’t I? Bring me a jug of water and a glass, that will do.”

Johanna nodded uncertainly; her face had hardened again, and she clearly still didn’t know what to make of this patient. She had already opened the door when Sabina halted her with a question: “What time is it, my dear Johanna? My gold watch, which was a gift from the devil, is under the mattress.”

The girl cleared her throat and said, as Sabina laughed again: “Nearly nine, I believe.”

Sabina mimed horror. “Oh, not long until I’ll be taken to Doctor Jung. For the first consultation. I expect it’s a very solemn occasion. I need to prepare myself now. Off you go.”

Johanna shut the door quietly behind her. And in fact, Sabina did feel that she had to prepare as well as she could for her confrontation with the doctor, to consider all options for escape and attack, in order to both seduce and repel that beautiful man at once. He must not believe that he was by nature vastly superior to her as a young woman – and by his education, of course. She

decided to embarrass him, to hound him out of his good-natured, calm demeanour. And he mustn't ask her what her wishes for the future were; she would keep them to herself. Her name was Sabina Spielrein, she was Jewish, and she was aware that her surname gave rise to mockery and grubby insinuations. That was something she had to live with. And wasn't that enough? Now, as so often, she would have liked magic powers, to transform herself into a cat and go to see the doctor in that shape, walking proudly with her tail in the air.

She changed her clothes again, slipping into her red Sunday dress, which her mother had luckily packed in the large leather bag, along with a few innocuous books, so that her poor confused daughter wouldn't be bored. Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* was there, probably as an injunction to her daughter to regret her incomprehensible behaviour. But she would rather follow *Madame Bovary*, which her mother had strictly warned her not to read. Sabina had therefore borrowed it from a schoolfriend in secret and smuggled it in at the very bottom of her bag, underneath the bundle of woollen stockings, which she hated. But she had no desire to read; instead, she spent a long time looking at herself in the mirror on the wall, which was small and cloudy, but was at least there, half covered by the shawl that had been hung over it. She put the shawl around her neck and endured her own reflection for a while. She was not at all beautiful, as certain men claimed; her nose was too crooked, her chin too pointed; she pulled a face, something she had learned to do as a child, discovering that it was useful for shocking or cornering people, though it was sure to fail with Doctor Jung.

Never mind, she could still try. Now she practised a pert smile, raising her eyebrows to look interesting and clever. She knew it confused young men. Middle-aged men, too?

She consulted her pocket watch, which she had also smuggled in. Eleven o'clock was still a long way off. She read a few pages of Flaubert's novel, quickly realising that the opening scene bored her. And so she pushed the reading chair over to the window and looked out at the equally boring lawns, above which hung a cloudy sky, and saw women in hospital clothes wandering up and down the gravel paths, alone or in pairs, some of them trailing the hem of their skirts on the ground, which Sabina thought degrading. She felt like beating both fists against the windowpane, or throwing open the window and shouting out her disapproval. But she didn't. A doctor in Rostov had told her not to succumb to her every impulse: it would damage her mental health. In any case, as she had already discovered, the window was locked with a key. Rattling it did no good, and she could leave breaking the glass for later, if necessary. She looked at the second hand of her watch – a quarter to eleven, now – and considered whether the time was passing quickly or fast. The thought crossed her mind that if she had a pot of lipstick with her, she would use it now; she was almost nineteen, after all, an age when other women were married with children.

“Those women,” her mother had told her in her matter-of-fact tone, “are of a lower class than us. We must wait for a suitable match, and that might not come until your mid-twenties or even later.” She had spoken Russian, which sounded less genteel. So much had to happen in secret in this household, when you were a

young woman. Her brothers enjoyed all kinds of privileges. She was fed up with it, though she now knew how to draw attention to herself.

At five to eleven, the nurse came in. Johanna had knocked several times without eliciting any response from Sabina, who now felt oppressed by the upcoming visit after all, though she would never have admitted that to anyone.

“It’s time,” Johanna said. “Are you really going to wear that...” she trailed off, and Sabina nodded: “Yes. I don’t suppose you have any lipstick, do you?”

Johanna blushed. “Only for Sundays,” she managed, awkwardly. “I don’t have it with me.”

She went ahead and Sabina followed, taking deliberately small steps. Her shoes didn’t go with the dress; she should have changed them, too, especially since her mother really had thought of everything. They walked down long corridors, which all smelled the same, of stale air and vegetable soup and floor polish. They should ventilate the place regularly, thought Sabina. She thought she could hear a murmuring from all sides. Yes, ventilate! That was another one of those long words she loved. They came to a heavy door, and Johanna knocked on it with surprising force. It was a while before the door opened. Before them stood Doctor Jung. He was a head taller than both women, and after taking a surprised look at Sabina’s dress, he bent down slightly to her. “Come in, Fräulein Spielrein. It’s nice that you’re so punctual.”

Johanna said a brief hello and left.

“You are very tall,” said Sabina, “and equipped with a broad ribcage.”

Jung seemed taken aback. Then he laughed. “Does that bother you?”

“No, not me. But doctors who treat nervous complaints shouldn’t be so tall. It has an intimidating effect on the patients. Doesn’t it?”

“Well, that depends.” Jung ushered her into the room and indicated an armchair, before taking a seat on his own hard chair. Between them lay a desk overflowing with papers.

“You speak excellent German, with almost no accent,” said Jung, after a silence that almost became oppressive, but which was clearly deliberate on the part of the doctor, who was once again wearing light-coloured clothing.

Sabina made an effort to be polite. “I love languages,” she said. “I would like to speak as many as possible. And to say something different in each one.”

Jung gave her a searching look. “Such as what?” His voice sounded a little husky, which irritated her.

“Oh, Doctor Jung,” – she stretched herself a little – “those are my secrets. They are of no concern to anyone. Do you understand?”

“So, how are you feeling?” he asked, without further ado.

She pretended to consider this carefully and then whispered, as if it were a secret: “sometimes good, sometimes bad. But actually, I don’t know. Do you know how you’re feeling?”

He smiled and put a hand to the frame of his glasses. “To some extent, dear lady. But that is not what we are here to discuss.”

She tried to mimic his searching look. “So, I am what we are here to discuss?”

“Precisely. That is our arrangement, if you will.”

“And if I don’t?”

“Then you will disappoint your parents.”

“And you, too?”

He smiled again; it had been her intention to make him smile. “I don’t know that yet. For the moment, why don’t you tell me why you are here?”

“Because my parents urged me to come. And other people I respect who can’t bear me.”

“Were you forced?”

“Convinced, I think that’s the right word.”

“Speaking of respect: what about your parents?”

“You mean do I respect them, or do they respect me?”

He hesitated, touched his nose for a moment. “Ah, yes, I see that could be taken either way.”

Now it was her turn to smile, and she rubbed her hands as if trying to give herself courage. “I respect them most of the time, but they respect me less, and my brothers – especially the middle one, Isaak – they sometimes say with my attacks I’m escaping the devil.”

“Attacks?”

She shook her head like a disappointed teacher. “I’m sure they told you about those, Doctor. Unfortunately, these attacks come over me from time to time, and people find them frightening. Afterwards, I don’t remember very much about them.”

Jung nodded, rather too gravely, she thought.

“They say I scream, quake, squirm, struggle. Oh, it’s frightful, isn’t it?”

He was silent, but now his smile had vanished as if someone had wiped it from his face.

“Do you want to see?”

He remained silent.

She breathed deeply, and then more deeply still, working herself up into an almost grotesque bout of panting; she threw herself about between the arms of the chair, tousled her hair, let out a sudden, piercing scream, almost fell to the floor, then suddenly fell silent. “Now, I did that on purpose,” she said, when she had got her

breath back. “My body knows how these attacks go. But usually it just happens, and I can’t do anything to stop it.”

Jung nodded. “So, you do know quite a lot about them, then?”

She blushed, feeling she had been caught out, though not that she was in any danger, because he was still so calm. “Now I’m tired,” she said. “I could fall asleep at any minute.”

“As you wish.”

“Aren’t you going to punish me?”

He shook his head. “Why should I? This a therapeutic consultation. Anything is possible here.”

His words sounded reassuring, and she was sure he wasn’t lying. Her three brothers lied all the time, and her father, too, it’s just that he concealed it better behind his beard. She leaned back, crossed her legs, smoothed her red skirt. Then she closed her eyes, though she squinted at him from time to time to see if he was still watching her. He was, his expression calm and mildly concerned; it must take more than this to make him lose his composure. But that was what she had spent most of her time doing these past few weeks: making people lose their composure. She didn’t know why; that was what she wanted him to tell her. Or was “reveal to her” a better way of putting it?

But she decided to say nothing for the moment, not wanting him to think she was going to open herself up to him just like that.

And so she barely moved, merely shifting the position of her legs imperceptibly now and again on the uncomfortable chair. But he, too, was silent, and just as stubborn as she was. It seemed to her that he gave off a faint aroma of tobacco, which she found not unpleasant, though the smoke from her father's pipe had often bothered her.

The time now passed very slowly. But she wasn't bored; the images in her mind, which were mostly to do with her brothers, her parents and the man opposite her, tumbled over one another, making no sense. The thin mathematics teacher who had always given her such meaningful looks also became part of this cosmos, which cheered and at the same time incensed her. "Leave me in peace!" she burst out, suddenly. But Jung didn't react. She must have dozed for a while, because when he did speak, his voice made her jump.

"I'm sorry?" she asked, brushing the hair from her forehead.

"Our time is up," said Jung, without any special emphasis, and she saw that he had been consulting his pocket watch, which hung from a chain. "We'll meet again at the same time tomorrow. Goodbye!"

Not a word more, no evaluation, no interpretation of her behaviour. So that was how it was going to be. She smoothed her skirt, got up, nodded to him and left the room without another word. She could be silent, too; she had practised that as a child. Now there was no one outside to conduct her through the corridors. But she found her own way back to her room – or was it a cell? Number 114, she had remembered that, the number was

engraved on an oval plaque above the doorframe, she remembered a great deal, often irrelevant things. And even though she felt an urge to enter one of the other rooms, uninvited, as an intruder, she didn't do it. She wouldn't rule out the possibility at some other time, however, when she might relish the shock of some surprised patient. When did she really feel superior and sure of herself? Mostly when she was the one to take the initiative. But with Jung, that strategy had come to nothing. Sooner or later, she was sure to succeed in coaxing him out of his reserve. Yes, and she was a hysteric, so anything was possible; she was sure Doctor Jung wouldn't put her in a straitjacket. With that, she walked into room 114; the door was still open and her belongings lay where she had left them – in splendid disarray, thought Sabina. Her mother would be horrified. She sat down on the bed, which was more of a couch. She couldn't stop thinking about the man whose name was Jung; or about men in general, both near and far. They were so various, and yet the same in their manner, they hid behind the self-importance they had learned to display. She could see it in her brothers. Sabina hid her true self as well, or she would lose herself. Was it the same for men? She would induce Doctor Jung to drop his façade, to take her part, to save her, as it was his job to do. To save her from everyone and to protect her from what was coming her way. Including with regard to men. She would have to marry one eventually, of course, that could scarcely be avoided. But whom?

She took off her blood-red dress; she wouldn't wear it to any more of the consultations. A modest, pearly-grey dress, that would be the

proper thing. Or even the hospital garb. The highly respected Herr Jung would certainly be amazed at that.

In her loose nightshirt, she lay down and pulled the covers over her, although the sun was shining in through the window. Her strange conversation with the doctor resounded in her like a scornful but sombre echo. He would want to know what she dreamed about – she had been told that in advance. She thought about inventing a special dream for him, one with nightingales and elephants. That made her laugh. And then she fell asleep in spite of herself, and what she dreamed of was something entirely different. She found herself standing in a large field. Or a kind of wasteland, not another soul in sight, no houses, no trees, and a despair grew within her at the prospect of being forever alone, and it seemed to her that her bare feet had taken root in the soft ground, because when she tried to move, she was trapped, motionless, merely a part of the landscape, and she didn't want that at any price. Suddenly someone was there, close by. She woke with a start and opened her eyes with some effort, her heart pounding. It was still daylight, and Johanna was standing before her in her ugly cap.