



**CERTIFIABLE**  
**SUSAN S. LEVINE**

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## Certifiable

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Sandra arrived, fifteen minutes early, at the correct corridor on the correct floor of the Waldorf; it took a full tour of the horseshoe-shaped hall before she located the double doors to her future—the site of her interview for board certification in psychoanalysis. It seemed as though her entire career had been merely a lead-up to this moment. A doctorate in clinical psychology, followed by seven years of psychoanalytic training—seminars, supervised cases, her own psychoanalysis—these were but the price of admission. Although she had earned the right to practice psychoanalysis independently, board certification would permit

her to take the final step: to become a supervising analyst. She felt prepared to assume the joyous and weighty responsibility of training the next generation.

Sandra made a pit stop in the single-occupant green-marbled ladies' room and stood for a moment to collect herself, checking her reflection in the gilt-framed mirror. Her hair was in place, styled to cover largish ears that flushed scarlet in moments of strong emotion, the subject of much teasing and tears since kindergarten. The irony that she was now engaged in a career so dependent on these organs of embarrassment had not escaped her.

Black-rimmed glasses always matched her bag and shoes, the single color a long-standing method of regulating her shoe hunger—shoelimia, she called it. She wore low heels that

day so as not to risk towering over her male interviewers. Black trousers, a nubby gray cashmere blazer. Unassailably professional but feminine, too, in case one of the interviewers was of the old school. She permitted herself one touch of madness. Literally: Grain de Folie by Grès. Clementine, jasmine, tonka bean.

Sandra then made her way to the Park Avenue Center—though perhaps it ought to have been called room 101 after Orwell—where she was to meet her interviewers, Dr. Henry Knowe, (yes!) from New Haven, and Dr. Richard Ebing, from Los Angeles. They would not know her name—though they would recognize her if they'd heard her paper on courage and masochism the previous afternoon. Neither examiner had any papers to his credit, so Sandra

had not been able to learn anything about their preferred psychoanalytic theories.

The room was cavernous, unwelcoming: frigid January air infiltrated the row of large windows, which did not appear to be double-glazed. Sandra draped her coat over her shoulders, put her lined leather gloves on. At the appointed hour, a woman she did not know came to the room. “Dr. Krasnapol, your examiners are running at least twenty minutes late. The interview will still last ninety minutes, though.” No expression of regret for any inconvenience this might cause. Sandra’s husband, Will, hadn’t yet succumbed to the inevitability of a cell phone, so she had no way to reach him; and she hadn’t packed extra batteries for their son’s Walkman.



“All right. Thanks for letting me know,” Sandra said. “I wonder if you could ask for the heat to be turned up in here.” The woman nodded and left.

Suddenly so anxious that she could not sit still, Sandra began pacing around the long conference table. It was difficult to keep her mind off all the certification scuttlebutt. Although there were certainly serious reasons to question the validity of the examination process, it would do her no good to dwell on those now; passing through this fiery hoop was a requirement if she wished to become a supervising analyst.

Outside the windows, large flags created a kaleidoscope of color over grayed and icy Park Avenue. On the other side of the room there hung photographs of celebrities who had

frequented the hotel: Dina Merrill, Frank Sinatra, the Duchess of Windsor. Truly a bizarre collection of witnesses.

Photos.

Flags.

The snapping flags, she saw, were American, of course, the Waldorf's own; a third was unidentifiable. Mexico, maybe? Italy?

She walked around the room. *Perhaps they'll blindfold me and make me stick my hand in a bowl full of peeled-grape "eyeballs."* She smiled in spite of herself. Then, as she neared the door at the far corner of the room, she heard male voices in the corridor. Her adrenaline spiked.

The two examiners, twin-suited men of medium height and medium years, stopped short upon entering an apparently empty room.

Sandra's greeting startled them: "Hello—I'm here, behind you." Dr. Knowe, the slightly grayer one with a bit of gravel in his voice, introduced himself and Dr. Ebing. They extended their hands, and she offered her gloved one. *A lady need never remove her glove in order to shake hands*, Sandra remembered vaguely from her years-ago fascination with Emily Post. Dr. Ebing, stocky, rheumy-eyed, said. "This is my first examination for the committee, so I'll mostly be listening today." He sniffled.

Dr. Knowe sat at the head of the long conference table, rolling the chair back almost to the wall. Sandra hesitated—was he oblivious or asserting his seniority?—but then the doctor noticed that he had blocked her way around and

rose. With just inches between them, she briefly caught a pleasant aroma of tobacco and citrus.

Sandra settled in her chair. That woman hadn't done anything about the heat, so Sandra left her coat draped over her shoulders; but she took her gloves off.

The two examiners set out their dog-eared and red-penciled copies of the two twenty-page case reports that Sandra had submitted months earlier. The guidelines had been precise only about page numbers and font sizes, vague about what mattered: “The committee is seeking evidence of how the applicant thinks and works as a psychoanalyst.” She was especially proud of her work with her patient Cammie, by any measure an exemplary treatment. The second case, however—that of Peter, an attorney—was a potential obstacle.

Peter's case was a crapshoot, unavoidable because Sandra had no other patient near the termination phase—a requirement set by the examiners. To wait for another patient to finish would mean to put her advancement at the institute on indefinite hold. Some of Peter's sessions in the final months had taken place by telephone—his work on a blockbuster lawsuit prevented him from going home to sleep, much less getting to analytic sessions. The use of the phone, however, was still controversial, although her institute was progressive in this respect.

Sandra had talked over the Peter problem with Dan Hoffen and Avril Redmann, her two mentors, her psychoanalytic “parents.” Both urged her to go forward with her application as it was rather than wait for another patient to terminate. Dan had been Sandra's favorite

supervisor, but somehow she had not met Avril until the year after she graduated. Avril taught mostly courses in the treatment of children, while Sandra worked exclusively with adults. Everyone knew who Avril was, though. Suited and brooched, she usually asked the smartest question of every visiting lecturer. She and Sandra met at a pre-lecture dinner where polite chitchat unearthed that they were both graduates of Bryn Mawr, some twenty-five years apart. They'd talked dorms and majors, strawberries and maypoles, and set up a lunch date in whispers as the speaker was being introduced. Sandra left the table in a state of enchantment. That's who I want to be when I grow up, she thought, feeling ridiculous to have such a notion when she was over forty.

Sandra's best friend and classmate from training, though, disagreed with Dan and Avril's confidence in the outcome. Suzanne, an academic psychiatrist, understood the politics of advancement. With the remnants of her North Carolina drawl: "Those phone sessions? Those turds are gonna think you believe in reality more than in the unconscious. If you don't tell 'em, they'll never guess from the material. Honey, I think you're a fool not to put a fresh coat of paint on this. Dunn't change the shape of the room."

Suzanne was not alone in her cynicism. Waves of rants both bitter and high-minded flooded the association's listserv. *Certification is unscientific, lacking in validity, rigid, and orthodox about technique and theoretical orientation. Arbitrary, biased, noncollegial.*

More than a few strident listservers proclaimed that the only way to gather the material that would pass muster with the certification committee was to invent it, to change an actual analysis into an idealized fictional one. Sandra did not want to believe that anyone who had earned the right to be called a psychoanalyst would act with such an absence of integrity, such disregard for the truth. It was perhaps a failure of imagination, perhaps a naïveté that her own analysis had not addressed, but she expected that she and her work would be treated with respect.

The conference room had become, if anything, even chillier.

Well, Dr. Krasnapol, we have a few questions about your patient P., the lawyer, but we'd like to get through those quickly and spend most of our time discussing your female, C." Dr.



Knowe looked at his notes, opening a crimson lacquered fountain pen. Dr. Ebing opened his mouth to speak, then snapped it closed as Dr. Knowe continued. “Now, could you please say a few words about P.’s attendance—and lack thereof—at sessions during the final months?”

“Of course,” Sandra said. “I was always on alert for signs of resistance or unconscious relief about not being with me in person, but what came up, over and over, was how angry he was that he’d been assigned to work on this trial. Not being in person—well, I actually think it stirred up feelings of longing that might otherwise never have emerged. On the phone, he could hear my breathing so clearly; it felt *more* physical to him than being a few feet away from me in the office. He would sit in his office on the floor—lights out, so that no passing paralegal or

partner could shove another sheaf of documents at him. This brought out intense sexual feelings toward me as well as some memories of sleeping next to his parents as a very young child. New material for him. I brought a transcript of one of those sessions. Shall I read that to you?"

"No. That won't be necessary. We just wanted to be certain that you understood how problematic the telephone is. Unless Dr. Ebing would like to hear the session?"

Dr. Ebing was readying a bottle of eye drops; he shook his head.

"No. Then let's move on to your patient C. Could you please give us a précis and then some clinical material?"

That was *it*? No more about Peter? No challenge to the validity of the termination?

Sandra's head shimmied involuntarily as she struggled to switch her mind from Peter to Cammie.

Sandra summarized: a magna cum laude graduate of Vassar, Cammie had just started graduate work in English at Penn. She'd developed writer's block for the first time ever as she began her honors thesis and was terrified that this would cripple her in graduate school. Now in her sixth year of a four-day-a-week psychoanalysis, she was through with classes, beginning her dissertation, so the final test of the effectiveness of the treatment was at hand.

Dr. Knowe paged through his notes as she spoke. "Could you please tell us a little more about the incident when C.'s father forced her to swim?"

“This was typical of C.’s memories of her father,” Sandra explained. “She was around four at the time. He’d bought some sort of flotation device, which she refused to use. One day, he strapped the thing around her belly and carried her out to the middle of a swampy lake. She started screaming, ‘I can’t swim! Help! They’re gonna bite me!’ She thought that eel grass was actually eels. Her father walked back to shore without turning around. C.’s mother filmed the entire episode, because they wanted her to see that she could swim. But the tape became a regular part of family movie nights—a humiliating inside joke.”

Sandra felt as though she, too, had been abandoned to panic in the eel grass. Dr. Knowe flipped back and forth between his notes and the pages of her report and did not appear to be

concentrating on what she was saying. Dr. Ebing looked miserable; Sandra hoped that whatever he had wasn't contagious.

She continued, "I don't think C. could have made it as far as she did—back to the shore and in life—if she hadn't been born with a strong psychobiological endowment and high frustration tolerance. She was absolutely determined to survive that household."

Neither of the men gave any response.

"If you don't have any questions, I can read from a session." Was that annoyance on Dr. Knowe's face? Was she supposed to say, "Mother, may I?"

"Go ahead." Dr. Knowe said. A particularly strong gust of wind whistled around Park Avenue and through the unimproved windows.

Sandra drew her coat closer around her. Dr. Ebing appeared to be struggling to consummate a sneeze.

She took a drink of water and then turned to the typed session transcript at the top of her pile, a session in which Cammie had felt unduly criticized by her dissertation adviser. This time around, though, Cammie felt angry rather than helpless as the professor listed various elements missing from her chapter. Sandra paused, but the two examiners remained silent. *Come off it, guys. I'm not on your couch. This is supposed to be a discussion. A collegial discussion.*

Feeling unappreciated on her own behalf and Cammie's, she couldn't help adding: "C. couldn't have allowed herself to experience such anger consciously even two years earlier—and

certainly couldn't have self-analyzed it and remembered that the guy was not all bad.”

Dr. Knowe's sounded impatient. “Yes, we can gather that. Continue with the session, please.”

Sandra took another sip of water before she resumed reading. Dr. Ebing jotted a few notes.

C. continued. “‘Professor Smith,’ I said, ‘I beg your pardon. Didn't you say you only needed to see the draft today?’ And he said, ‘Oh, you're right. I did say that, didn't I? Okay, well, never mind. Just keep up the good work, my dear.’ I was stunned. I don't think his voice changed very much. I must have growled it up in my head. You know, like I did last week when you didn't say anything when I walked in late?”

“Yes,” I said, “when you realized you'd projected your anger at yourself onto me. You recognized that neither I nor your

adviser intended to throw you in over your head. Unlike your father.”

The two doctors just sat there, neutral and silent. Tabula rasa, she thought: the occupational hazard of psychoanalysts. A momentary anger distracted her from her anxiety. Did they give a damn about the rationale for her interpretation? Did they appreciate the fractal irony—the case of a patient facing judgment of her work as Sandra’s offering of *her own* work?

Sandra continued to read, her voice sounding stranger to her with each sentence, heart sinking, covering her panic with gentility. She didn’t know what to do, how to handle such a painfully awkward encounter. At exactly ninety minutes, Dr. Knowe said, “All right, then. Thank you very much. The chair will be in touch with you.”



Dr. Ebing fumbled in his jacket and coat pockets as he stood, finally retrieving a well-used handkerchief. He blew his nose. “Nice to have met you,” he said, extending his germmy hand. He probably hadn’t memorized Emily Post, Sandra thought, but this was downright thoughtless. She wished she had already put her gloves on.

The men left the room, and Sandra stood for a full minute, shocked by the reception her work had gotten, shocked and deeply unsettled. She was disgusted at having had to play the supplicant, but what choice did she have? You need a passport if you want to travel beyond borders. Was this the committee’s idea of a collegial review? She imagined the discussion of her application that would take place at the committee’s meeting, knowing with intuition

and dread that it would only be a slightly more civilized rendition of Cammie's family's watching and rewatching her panicked flailing in the water.

Sandra had to wait for Will when she finally got outside onto Park Avenue, below the flags. The Waldorf doormen had made him circle the block until she arrived. "How'd it go?" Will asked as they kissed. Sandra just shook her head. She turned to the back seat and saw that the Walkman and its earphones were on the floor. Thirteen-year-old Jonathan, arms tightly crossed, was looking out the window, already in a mood. They were going to start the drive home during the height of rush hour.

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During the miles of stop-and-start traffic, Sandra's anxiety mounted. She thought back to

the association's spring meeting, six months earlier. She had attended a program for future applicants, an afternoon workshop sponsored by the certification committee in order to demonstrate their fair and open evaluation process. Fighting for its life, the committee had gone on the offensive. In a mock-up of a committee meeting, a case report submitted by a previous applicant had been discussed by a member, Josh Bringsman, whom Sandra happened to know.

At the meeting, Sandra found one of the last available seats and began to read her numbered copy of the confidential case material. There were misspellings in the first paragraph; her heart sank. And her confusion and perturbation only grew. The applicant mentioned having contact with a family member without obtaining

permission from the patient: a beginner's ethical error, unfathomably stupid to acknowledge in writing. Why would anyone permit this report to be used, even anonymously?

Josh, whose teddy-bear figure disguised a spare, acerbic brilliance, was downright cuddly that afternoon. "Reading between the lines here, I think this analyst may have meant X." "The analyst might have been relying on Y.'s theory." Sandra believed in giving people the benefit of the doubt unless it was clearly undeserved, but she would have been hard-pressed to find any positive comments to make about either the writing or the treatment.

Troubled, she left the room immediately after the question-and-answer period, avoiding a couple of acquaintances on her way to the ladies' room. The line extended into the hall.

She stood, lost in thought, oblivious to the animated chatter around her. How could certification be so difficult if the committee took seriously a case that could barely qualify as competent psychotherapy, much less an analysis?

As she was nearing the front of the line, she heard someone call her name. She turned to see Josh and, weighing her curiosity against the fullness of her bladder, waved the next woman ahead.

They air-kissed. “I saw you across the room, but you left before I could get away. So what did you think? I thought it went well.”

“Um . . .” Sandra hesitated, uncertain of how frank she should be. “Well, I have to say that I was taken aback by all the positive comments

you made. I thought the treatment was poor. And the writing, too.”

“Yeah. Yeah, it was pretty bad. So?” Josh sounded impatient.

What a strange reaction, she thought. She hadn’t expected him to acquiesce so readily.

“Then . . . then why were you so forgiving of the analyst? And why choose this particular case?”

The line at the ladies room was jostling, noisy. Josh took her arm and guided her across the patterned carpet. He looked around, lowered his voice. “Keep this to yourself, okay? Ruth Robertson—the chair, you know—she picked the case. The goal was to make certification seem more user-friendly.”

“I don’t understand. How could the committee pass a case like this?” She frowned, confused, and Josh cocked his head expectantly toward her, waiting for her to figure it out.

“What? Oh, my God, no! It didn’t pass? You used a bad report to make it look easy?”

The applicant had *not* been certified after all! The entire demonstration had been predicated on the unspoken assumption: *See how simple we make it? If this analyst can pass, you can, too!* But the committee hadn’t actually said—and nobody had asked—if this distinctly nonstellar applicant had indeed been certified based on this report.

“If they abolish the committee,” Josh said, “there won’t be anyone else to protect standards.

Psychoanalysis will become no better than psychotherapy.” Disdainful, righteous.

Sandra stepped back as though he had struck her. Her disgust and shock must have been evident, for Josh’s jaw took on a defiant set under his beard. She felt she could not stay in his presence for another second and mumbled something about needing to use the bathroom before the next workshop started.

Sandra sat in the privacy of the stall longer than necessary, trying to absorb what had just occurred. The notion that every single member of that committee—there must have been thirty-five of them, at least—would collude in such corruption and dishonesty was so unsavory that Sandra felt as though she’d been fed sawdust. To *pretend* that this terrible case represented certification-worthy psychoanalysis? Would the



committee prioritize its own survival above all else? Sandra could not believe in such a massive loss of integrity—knowledge of this sting operation must have been limited. By then the only person left in the ladies’ room, she washed her hands thoroughly.

Sandra had dismissed the idea of canceling her application then, but now, after her own interview, horns honking impatiently on the New Jersey Turnpike, she wondered whether she had made the wrong decision. Yet certification that included tolerating violations of one’s dignity was apparently the only route to advancement.

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Sandra had trouble concentrating in her sessions as she awaited the results of her interview; the call came during her lunch break three days later. “Dr. Krasnapol, I’m sorry to have to tell

you that the committee had some reservations about your work,” said Ruth Robertson. “We have put a hold on your application until we can reexamine you in June at the conference in San Diego.”

A punch in the solar plexus. Sandra mustered: “Can you tell me what happened?”

“Oh, that’s not how we do it. You’ll receive a detailed letter in a few weeks, and you can call me then if you have questions. And don’t worry: the committee believes that you’re certifiable.” Dr. Robertson practically hung up on her.

*Certifiable?* That’s precisely what *would* be if she did not pass on her second attempt. Her heart was beating in her stomach, her head exploding with unanswered questions. Was she living in an alternative reality in which

everything she'd been taught had been wrong?  
Could Avril and Dan have been wrong, too?

She spent a month in torturous self-doubt before the letter arrived.

To her surprise, Peter's unusual termination did not seem to have been the stumbling block. The committee simply asked for a letter stating that she understood that she should have interpreted more forcefully the patient's resistance to his feelings about ending the analysis. Dr. Robertson assured her that the committee would not need to return to this matter. A fair exchange, she thought: a little eating of crow for the crediting of a terminated case.

No, the issue was Cammie. Sandra read with disbelief: "The committee felt that you were too

active with your female patient and that you made too many interpretations about the analysand's childhood. Please submit for our review two new sets of three consecutive sessions with this patient no later than four weeks prior to the interview. The committee wants to see that you have accepted our feedback and that you know how to let this patient work on her own." Sandra could not understand why the good Drs. Knowe and Ebing hadn't mentioned these concerns during the interview.

Dr. Robertson had invited her to call with questions, and Sandra did so, if only to make certain that she had understood the committee's requirements accurately. At Dr. Robertson's suggestion, she also spoke directly with Dr. Knowe, who confirmed what she'd been told.

Sandra had only four months to harvest and then transcribe two runs of sessions during which it was clinically appropriate for her to remain nearly silent. She didn't even know how often such sessions occurred consecutively—she had never thought to monitor such a useless metric. And she realized that this was going to require scrupulous attention to prevent her needs from leaching into Cammie's sessions. The inescapable fact, though, was that whatever she did—interpret or remain still—would be influenced by the committee's desires, which did not belong in her consulting room.

Chafing, burdened, insecure, Sandra began collecting clinical material immediately. She had always taken almost verbatim notes when patients were on the couch—it helped her follow the trail of bread crumbs. But during nine weeks

of painstaking transcription of Cammie's every word, pause, and tone, Sandra awakened every few nights with tingling in her right hand—carpal tunnel's protest against this sadomasochistic search. She dreamed recurrently of sitting on one side of a long table in an interrogation; she was also the interrogator, on the other side, and she could not formulate answers to her own questions. Once she awoke to Will rubbing her shoulder—she had been moaning aloud. She felt like a fool for persisting, yet she could not back down. Like Mount Everest, certification was there. The conclusions she had reached in her paper on courage and masochism haunted her: the two are irreducibly intertwined.

Tormented by uncertainty, Sandra took an additional step to prepare for June. She asked

Avril Redmann if they could meet and do a mock interview. Avril, she knew, would not hesitate to point out any problems with the case material. “Come over on Sunday,” Avril said. “I’ll make a little brunch, and we can do a Spanish Inquisition afterward.”

They sat in Avril’s living room, a space so airy that three walls of books did not diminish the light. As Sandra read the sessions aloud, a polished brass carriage clock ticked gently on the side table. Avril sat, head cocked, cheek resting on her hand, gazing into the distance with eyes unfocused, and Sandra grew increasingly self-conscious, anxious. Was the material not as good as she thought? Had she really been beyond the looking glass all this time?

Sandra continued. “This was a Monday session. The previous week, C. had been working on the most original section of her dissertation. She came into the office and couldn’t seem to get comfortable on the couch. For around fifteen minutes she went back and forth about how uncertain she was about debunking the ideas of an eminent scholar, flailing as she waited to hear back from her adviser. When she fell silent, I said, ‘Flailing?’”

“Stop,” said Avril. “That was exactly right. She’s trying to get you to be the opposite of her father. To rescue her from the pond when she doesn’t need rescuing anymore. She’s in conflict about symbolically castrating a father figure, but she’s ready to swim in these waters. And she’s in conflict about accepting her own authority without her adviser’s permission. Kind of funny



that you've found yourself in a similar position, isn't it?"

"Yeah—like I'm having to make sure I wasn't just dreaming that I am a competent analyst."

"If they don't certify you based on this material, I don't know what they're looking for. To call your competence as an analyst into question is unforgivable." Avril thought for a minute, then added, "You're doing something else important for this patient, though it isn't psychoanalytic: she needs to identify with a self-confident woman who can tolerate uncertainty. And that's you. She may not know consciously that all this is swirling around her treatment, but she must have gotten a sense of how steady and present you've been. I can hear that you've

managed to keep your internal turmoil out of the office when she's in it.”

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The second interview began on time; the sunny conference room at the Paradise Point resort, overlooking Mission Bay.

The handshakes and nice-to-see-you-agains had been perfunctory. Dr. Knowe gestured toward the package of cough drops beside Sandra's notes, and took a step back. “Do you have SARS?” he asked.

“No, just the remainder of a cold,” she said, in voice that still carried a touch of Bacall. She spotted a glint of sympathy in Dr. Ebing's eyes.

“Well, then,” said Dr. Knowe, “why don't you begin reading the second set of sessions?”

Sandra got only five minutes into the session before he interrupted her.

“Dr. Krasnapol, I am very concerned. The committee is concerned. We discussed this material at length, and everyone had the same impression. You’re much too silent. Just that single word—‘flailing?’ You need to say much more to this woman about the links between her feelings about you and her childhood.”

*What the fuck?* That was exactly what Dr. Robertson—and Dr. Knowe, for that matter—told her they’d seen too much of. Hidden beneath her wavy bob, Sandra’s ears burned with anger; but adversaries are best treated with velvet gloves and exacting diplomacy.

“Yes, I see why you’d say that, Dr. Knowe, and I did not interpret that here because I have

pointed these links out to her on many, many occasions. I believe she remembers them quite well. So I was concerned that saying that here would enact between us precisely what she needs to put into words on her own. And if she hadn't appeared to remember all this, I would have commented on *that*. Shall I continue reading?"

Dr. Ebing said, "Please, go on."

Sandra read for another five minutes, then Dr. Knowe interrupted again. "This is so confusing; the patient isn't speaking in complete sentences. Why didn't you smooth all this over for us?"

*You mean obscure my patient's meaning? Obscure the feeling contained in her pauses, in her hesitations? Be dishonest? Is that what you*

*mean? Do you really not know that people on the couch often don't speak in polished prose?*

What Sandra actually said was: “Excuse me, Dr. Knowe. You were quite clear when we spoke that you'd heard too much of me in the sessions I presented in January. You asked to see material showing exactly how *the patient* is able to work. How *the patient* struggles with the material. Her hesitations and her speech patterns demonstrate this.”

“Yes, well, your material is so different from what you showed us in the previous interview. Are you certain that you didn't simply make all this up, Dr. Krasnapol?”

*Make this all up?* Sandra's head began to throb, and she felt disoriented, incapable of responding in the moment to this monstrous

allegation. For to register fully, consciously, that she had just been accused of an unethical act would mean acknowledging that her fate had already been determined. She could not throw her own future away into the waters of the bay without a fight—if indeed there remained any possibility of saving herself.

Sandra’s reflexive politeness assumed control. She continued the interview, trying her best to respond thoughtfully to the barrage of questions. She should really have had an attorney at her side, she thought. Her heart could not have sunk any lower.

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Dr. Robertson, the chair of the committee, called the next day to say that she would need to return for a third interview. “The committee wants to see some sessions in which you are more active

with this patient. Who is doing quite well under your care, Dr. Krasnapol. Yes, very well indeed.”

“Then why?—if you can see that... I don’t understand.”

“Oh, you’re clearly a very accomplished clinician. Nobody on the committee doubted that. But we were not convinced that you have treated this patient *psychoanalytically*.”

Where on earth could these people have been trained? Did they not read the major analytic journals? That is, journals in which *her work* had already been published? Sandra’s anger was as certain as her self-confidence. *I know what psychoanalysis is, and my knowledge and skill deserve to be recognized. I earned this. And in*

that instant, she conferred certification upon herself—and the right to speak her mind.

“Let me be very clear with you, Dr. Robertson. I feel as though this has been like the Miss America contest. You told me first that I had worn a swimsuit to the evening gown competition. I have just come back in an evening gown, only to hear, ‘No, no, we wanted to see you in a swimsuit after all.’”

“Dr. Krasnapol, you are talking about bringing us different outfits, not showing us who you really are.”

“Dr. Robertson, everybody, including members of the committee, chooses different things to wear every day. And these are all *my* garments, from *my* closet.”



Dr. Robertson wasn't finished. "Oh, and another thing, Dr. Krasnapol. We'd advise you to postpone your third interview until you have another terminated case; we're not inclined to give you credit for the case of the attorney."

Miss Congeniality could not contain herself.

"What? Do you mean to tell me that you didn't think it important to convey this to me when we spoke months ago?"

"Well," she said, "it's possible we might have let it go if this interview had turned out differently."

"You must be joking. You yourself told me that we would *not* need to revisit the case of the lawyer. Don't you remember, Dr. Robertson? I asked you directly, to make certain that there was no misunderstanding. And now—only now

—you’re telling me that the committee might not have been prepared to certify me after this interview no matter how it went. It never occurred to you to mention this before I spent months preparing the material you asked for? And before I took an extra three days from my practice to be here for this interview? For this useless hazing?”

Rage and disillusionment roiled through Sandra’s body. Her heart pounded, and she felt like a heavy curtain had descended, muffling her voice, shrouding her hopes. Josh’s words replayed on a loop in the back of her mind: *The goal was to make certification seem more user-friendly*. The words she had chosen to disregard, to discard. The weight of knowledge overwhelmed her, for the course of her career had been permanently altered with that

poisonous sentence: *Are you certain that you didn't simply make all this up, Dr. Krasnapol?*

It was clear to Sandra only in retrospect that she should have left the room and immediately initiated a formal complaint. Perhaps that could have salvaged both her chances and her dignity. But chances for what? Tectonic plates had shifted beneath her; the landscape was no longer familiar. An abyss had opened: she would never be able to regard psychoanalytic institutions in the same way. The institutions that had taught her the values and ideals she cherished. Membership in a community of professionals who shared a devotion to truth and honesty—this had vanished. She would continue to love psychoanalysis itself, but she would never again submit to this auto-da-fé. And she would need to learn not to want to lead the institutions that

administered it. She began the hard and involuntary work of mourning.

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That Sandra withstood this ordeal with her love for psychoanalysis intact was a tribute to her own analysis and to her parents. But she could not have accomplished anything without Will, whose confidence in her she inhaled like oxygen. He was the first person she called, of course. They didn't speak long, because they didn't need to. She felt his sorrow and anger, and she felt him feeling all that she felt. So intertwined were they that Sandra no longer had a conception of life without him. Will: philosopher, film theorist, world-class martini maker. He would pick her up at the airport on Sunday and let her unpack first before inquiring in the intimately formal way she loved, "What

drink will you require this evening?” The urge to be home overpowered her. She reached for a tissue, the last one in the box. Nobody could do anything right in this resort, it seemed.

She pulled herself together and reached for her phone again; Avril had asked her to call as soon as she heard from Dr. Robertson. They talked for almost an hour, Sandra perched uncomfortably on the windowsill, the only place in her room her cell phone worked.

Avril was incensed by the disrespect and dishonesty. “It’s disgusting,” she said. “Your work was excellent. Just excellent. Unfortunately some analysts confuse the curiosity and questioning of a reasonable ego with the condemnation that derives from an overly harsh superego.” Sandra, raw, wounded, indignant, was warmed by Avril’s genuine

horror. “What they did to you was a travesty. This cannot stand, this bullying. And this is too much disillusionment for you, too. That’s a terrible thing.”

Sandra almost told Avril what she had learned from Josh outside the ladies’ room—that the committee deliberately enticed applicants to fly into its web. She held her tongue, though felt like a patsy for honoring the confidentiality of anyone connected with that corrupt committee.

✱

The final day of the conference would hold one more surprise. Sandra went to a reception for—well, she didn’t know whom, but it was held in the suite of the association’s president. She circulated, having to answer negatively to friends and colleagues who greeted her with their congratulations practically on their

tongues. She was happy to see Dan Hoffen: after she told him what happened, he said, “They don’t know what the fuck to do with you. You think so differently. You don’t work within a single theory, and they just couldn’t figure out what the fuck to do with that. It’s really shitty.” Sandra wondered if Dan and Avril had been blinded by their faith in her and by their eagerness to welcome her into the inner circle.

Later, from the protective haze of a gin and tonic, she thought she must have misheard the question posed to her by the editor of the association’s main journal. “Pardon?” she said, gesturing with her glass to the noisy room. She saw a glance pass between the editor and the third person in their huddle, both regular listserv ranters. “We’re trying to organize a class-action suit about certification. Would you be willing to

be the named plaintiff? Our test case?” Whereupon Sandra discovered that one’s jaw could actually drop. “No, thanks,” she said. “I’ve had my fill of martyrdom.”

Jonathan, fourteen by then, wrote her an e-mail that night that she printed out at home for her wallet and all future wallets: “They are stinky fuck-heads. Regardless of what those jerks think, I love you tons and I am very proud of you.”

✱

*Certifuckation*: that’s how she came to regard it and spell it, this corrupt and illegitimate process that was then the sole manner in which one could advance within the institutions of psychoanalysis. A proceeding conducted with probity by some, probably, but with collusive and scattershot thoughtlessness by many. They



were *psychoanalysts*, Sandra thought, and it was simply unacceptable for them to deploy sincerity as camouflage for sadism. At some point, though she couldn't remember the precise date, Sandra received a letter from Dr. Robertson, a close-fisted apology for the committee's miscommunications. She urged Sandra to return for a third interview.

Happily-ever-after endings happen in single sentences only in fairy tales, and that's not quite the way this episode reached its denouement. Cammie earned her doctorate two years after the debacle and moved across the country to begin a tenure-track position. The following fall, Jonathan left home for MIT. Two years after that, Sandra published her third book, *To Love or Not to Love: The Analyst's Forbidden*

Feelings. She celebrated as she continued to mourn.

Seven years later, when the certification committee was finally lawsuited out of existence, her promotion was only bittersweet. Vindication could not erase or repair disillusionment.

## About the Author

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Susan S. Levine, LCSW, BCD, FABP is in private practice in Ardmore, PA (and by video from the comfort of home of late) and is on the faculties of the Institute of the Psychoanalytic Center of Philadelphia. She is a former member of the Editorial Board of the Clinical Social Work Journal, Editorial Reader at the Annals of Internal Medicine (2008), and Editorial Associate an Editorial Reader at the International Journal of Psychoanalysis. She is the author of Useful Servants: Psychodynamic Approaches to Clinical Practice (Aronson, 1996 - also available at [freepsychotherapybooks.org](http://freepsychotherapybooks.org)), Loving Psychoanalysis: Technique and Theory in the Therapeutic Relationship (Aronson,

2009), and the editor of *Dignity Matters: Psychoanalytic and Social Perspectives* (Routledge, 2016). She received her training in clinical social work at the Bryn Mawr College Graduate School of Social Work and Social Research, in psychoanalytic psychotherapy at the Philadelphia Psychoanalytic Institute, and in adult psychoanalysis at the Institute of the Psychoanalytic Center of Philadelphia. She is currently completing a collection of linked short stories about psychoanalyst Sandra Krasnapol. The first Sandra story, “Seeing Red,” was published in *Constellations: a Journal of Poetry and Fiction* (Fall 2020).