The Hypnotist’s Wife

Caryn Russell*

*Iowa State University

Copyright ©1987 by the authors. Sketch is produced by The Berkeley Electronic Press (bepress).
http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/sketch
The Hypnotist’s Wife

The hypnotist waves his hand, 
as if stirring bath water, 
and puts his wife under. 
She has married him for this, 
to feel herself sink down, 
then float up, above 
the candle-lit faces of the lounge.

Learning was difficult. They were in love 
and she was fearful of exposing the hidden: 
her father with the whip, the Baptist preacher 
who held her head in a muddy river 
a moment too long.

A parlor game at first, the silver pendulum 
swinging all thought away was a guise 
for her to close her eyes 
and give her mouth to his.

With secret words, he has coaxed her deeper. 
The hypnotist lays her down upon the air 
for the audience to see 
him crossing a hoop 
over the invisible lines 
that aren’t holding her. 
He takes her hand 
and moves it like a jointed doll, 
proving she is far away.
Now, she only needs a slight suggestion, his hand over her eyes, or simply if he holds his own temple and concentrates, she will dream of a peaceful place where she is floating, relaxed and calm, in a bayou of ancient cedars. He has taught her how to die over and over, until her life has become familiar as a cup -- a blood tide leaving the body or water filling the lungs. She trusts him that much.

— Caryn Russell