

## 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