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Olga, whose husband is hopelessly ill in her own opinion, appears at the door of the renowned hypnotist's office. Mr. Mesmer is her last hope. The master faces a challenging task that could upend his established beliefs about the world...

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— Are you the greatest hypnotist? Olga asked stiffly, drenching herself in hot, sticky sweat. — I'm sorry to interrupt so abruptly, but you are my last hope to cure my husband of insanity. Please, help me!

"I'll ask you to wait outside, honorable stranger," the hypnotist named Mesmer spelled out politely. — I haven't finished my session with another distinguished guest.

Olga was followed by the hypnotist's secretary, Sofya. Tall and slender, dressed in a soft blue gown, she looked more like a young second-year student than a woman in her thirties working for a magnetizer. However, she was in her early thirties. Sofya's cheeks turned pink when she met Mesmer's questioning gaze, and she was about to scold Olga when the hypnotist stopped her with a gentle hand.

"Monsieur Mesmer," she began, carefully cooling each word in her mouth, "I ordered this woman to wait in the anteroom, but she didn't listen!"

"Sophus, my dear, let's save the unnecessary explanations for later," Monsieur Mesmer replied. "Please show our guest to the anteroom. I will see her later."

Olga stood motionless for a moment; her eyes fixed on Monsieur Mesmer. She felt that if she took even an inch back, she would never see the hypnotist again.

"My husband will end up in a mental hospital," Olga decided bitterly, wiping the sweat from her high forehead with a thick hand.

"I promise to take your request into consideration," the hypnotist said politely. "Now, if you could close the door from the outside."

It was difficult to agree, but she had to. Olga's legs were aching, and the soft chair offered by Sofia was much appreciated.

"Sofia, my dear," Olga repeated Mr. Mesmer's courteous tone, "I would like a cup of coffee."

"Of course," the secretary replied. "Please wait a moment."

The hands of the wall clock moved forward by half an hour. Mr. Mesmer's office door opened, and a man in a business suit emerged, his face expressionless. Or maybe it just seemed that way...

maybe this Mesmer is a con artist, not a hypnotist, Olga thought with great doubt. — Well, anyway, there's almost nothing to lose!

Sophia came. A small white Chinese porcelain cup with a pattern of tiny cranes on the side glittered in her delicate fingers. The smell of freshly brewed coffee slowly spread through the room in sweet invisible paths. Olga slowly looked around. On the walls of the reception room hung portraits of men who looked alike, who were probably Mr. Mesmer's relatives. Their eyes seemed to be fixed on the uninvited guest, as if reproaching her for her unceremonious intrusion. Olga didn't care. Even if they all spoke at once from the paintings, she probably wouldn't have paid much attention to the phenomenon. Olga's thoughts were consumed by the misfortune that had befallen her husband. Nikolai's compassionate wife had already visited two fortune-tellers and had a couple of encounters with various charlatans who claimed to be unique healers. Every time Olga sought a new way to alleviate her husband's persistent hallucinations, she encountered the same outcome. Her beloved husband continued to converse with invisible entities, defying common sense and her pleas for him to be normal.

"It's strange to even consider asking someone to become normal," Olga thought with regret, "as if madness is a whim rather than a disease!"

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