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## Magic Tea

He passed the place every day on his way to work. But he never thought he would actually stop there. It was for the strange, hippie people. Not for a normal, thirty-six year-old executive like Jeremy.

Madam Nowall – Psychic Therapy. The sign was big enough to be seen from outer space. And why not? Aliens probably needed psychics too.

Stepping out of his car, Jeremy *felt* like an alien. Strangers passing by were, no doubt, judging him as weird, if not crazy. Friends and family would be even less sympathetic.

He checked his watch: 12:15 p.m. He would have preferred coming at night, but oddly, Madam Nowall closed at 2:00 p.m. Hopefully, this would not take longer than his lunch hour.

Judy, one of the secretaries, had noticed that Jeremy seemed troubled, and offered him Madam Nowall's card. Yoga Judy. Incense Judy. Strange Judy.

Still, if doing this psychic thing could help his sleep problems, it would be well worth the ridicule of his co-workers.

Jeremy wasn't sure whether to knock or just open the door. Before he could decide, the door opened.

"Please come in, Sir."

The woman was not at all what he had expected. She was a very young, petite Chinese woman. In a lovely blue silk dress, embroidered with pink flowers. Her shiny black hair hung just above her shoulders. Her porcelain white face was flawless. By impulse, Jeremy's eyes went to her ring finger. No wedding ring.

Her English was broken, with a strong accent. But he had no trouble understanding her.

"Please have seat." She showed him to a comfy-looking leather chair. She sat down in a matching chair, directly in front of him. "I have made tea for you."

He saw the cup sitting on the small table next to his chair. "Thank you." Jeremy picked up the cup. "But how did you..."

"How I know you come?"

"Yeah."

She smiled warmly. "I know many thing."

He took a sip of his tea. "Delicious. What is it? Oolong?"

"No. It my own special blend. I call Magic Tea."

"Really?" He almost snickered. But her intense eyes made him take her seriously.

"You here because cannot sleep."

"How did you...never mind." He figured Judy had given her a heads up. "That's right. For a couple of months now I've had the problem. I toss and turn all night. And the over-the-counter sleep medicines I've tried didn't help at all. I was about to go to a

sleep specialist—”

“—but you come to me instead. Very wise.”

“Thank you.” He drank more of his tea. It tasted better with each sip.

“How you feel?”

“Better than I’ve felt all day. Relaxed. Kinda sleepy.”

“That good.”

“But I want to sleep *tonight*—in my bed. I don’t want to fall asleep *here*.” He finished off his tea.

“Just relax. Everything be okay.”

Those were the last words Jeremy heard before he drifted off.

When he woke up, he checked his watch. It was nearly 6 p.m. More than five hours had passed! “Madam Nowall?”

She walked out from the back. “Good. You awake now.”

“I can’t believe I slept for so long. I’m embarrassed. Did I snore?” He checked the corners of his mouth for drool.

“No. You very quiet. I think you sleep well.”

“That’s amazing. I can’t remember when I’ve slept that well.” He stood up. “How much do I owe you?” He pulled out his wallet.

“Two hundred dollar.”

He had come with cash, per Judy’s advice. “And how much for some of that Magic Tea?”

“Ten dollar a bag.”

Jeremy was puzzled. “You mean ten dollars a *box*.”

She smiled politely. “No. Ten dollar a bag. Only need one bag each night.”

“I’m sorry, but that’s outrageous.” He took two one-hundred dollar bills out of his wallet and handed them to her. “Thanks for your help. But I think I’m fine now. I don’t need any high-priced tea.”

“Very well.” She bowed.

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Jeremy got under the covers and turned off the lamp. To his surprise, he was sleepy—even after the long nap in Madam Nowall’s office. He was right. He didn’t need the tea. It was Friday night. He would sleep in tomorrow morning.

Before long, Jeremy began to dream...

The man slipped into the bank wearing a disguise and walked up to a teller. He place a money bag on the counter. “Empty your drawer. And don’t make any stupid moves.” He showed her the pistol under his jacket.

As the teller carried out his orders, a sweat broke out on her forehead. “That’s everything.”

“Thanks.” He picked up the bag and casually walked toward the front door.

A guard spotted him. “Sir?”

He whipped out his pistol and fired.

The guard went down.

He walked out of the bank, and down the sidewalk to his car. Pulling off his mask, he caught a glimpse of himself in the rearview mirror.

Jeremy woke up screaming. “No, that wasn’t me! I didn’t do that!” What a horrible dream. His sheets were moist with sweat.

He wondered if Madam Nowall was open on Saturday.

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“Come in, Jeremy.”

“I’ve got a problem.”

“Nightmares.”

“Yes.”

“You need Magic Tea.”

Jeremy had not dreamed anything while sleeping in Madam Nowall’s office. “How does the tea help with nightmares? How does it work?”

“Magic Tea make you forget.”

“Forget what?”

She hesitated. “You steal money. You kill man.”

“No. That was a dream.” Jeremy gulped. “How did you know about my dream?”

“No dream. You really do it. I go to back room while you sleep. I come out, you gone—in car.”

“You’re telling me that I sleep-walked a bank robbery?”

“Yes.”

“Then where’s the gun...and the money? I don’t even own a gun.”

“I take care of money and gun. No evidence. I protect you.”

Jeremy was speechless.

“Nobody ever know. You wear mask.”

“This is nuts. I should go to the police.”

“Okay. But you go to jail—for long, long time.”

Jeremy pondered the seriousness of the situation. “But I’ll never sleep again.”

“Yes, you will. I lie. You not rob bank.” She smiled.

“Why did you tell me I did it? You scared me half to death.”

She did not respond.

“But...if it was just a dream, how did you know what I dreamt?”

“Yesterday, while you sleep, I have radio on. Listen to news. Reporter say about bank robbery. You hear while sleeping.”

Jeremy breathed a sigh of relief. “So, I’m okay. It was just a nightmare—because of hearing the radio while I was sleeping. I don’t need the tea.”

“Yes, you do. To help you forget bad thing you do.”

“What bad thing?”

She hesitated.

“Tell me. What bad thing?”

“You hit man with car. You don’t stop to help.”

Jeremy’s face turned pale. “How did you know about that? It was on a country road. Nobody saw. I didn’t tell anybody. And anyway, he was okay. He didn’t die.”

“He not die. But he in wheelchair. He never walk again—because you not go back, call for help. Someone find him much later. Too late for doctor to save leg.”

Jeremy’s eyes began to well up. “I know. I should have stopped.”

“Now you live with it. That why you can’t sleep.”

Jeremy hung his head.

“That why you need Magic Tea. It help you forget.”

He bought ten bags.

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Madam Nowall became like a drug dealer to Jeremy. Occasionally, he would try to stop using the tea. But the nightmares always returned. Either the one where he ran over a man, or the one where he robbed a bank and killed the guard.

The authorities had never been able to track down that bank robber. Although, the lead detective was reportedly getting close.

But Jeremy now leads a normal, happy life. And will continue to do so as long as he has his MAGIC TEA.

THE END

