

EXTRACT #19 (TOBY CHRISTIAN)

The woman finishes reading. The man to whom she has read thinks the writing is pretty good though he has reservations, such as the inclusion of the shipwreck story, which he thinks doesn't work though it is a good enough image in itself. He thinks it alters the tone and the slightly circular nature of the text too much and thinks that up until then there was something inevitable, inexorable about their fate. The inclusion of the story within the story only served to disperse the atmosphere of the duel and gave the reader too much room time to turn away from it. He doesn't say any of this to the woman for the moment, who, even though she is interested in his opinion—indeed that is why she read the text in the first place—has, in the midst of relating it, experienced a crisis of confidence in the work itself.

Reading it out loud has done something different to the writing and she is no longer convinced by it. She now feels that it is anachronistic. She now thinks it reads like it was written in another time; an earlier time. They both continue to think about it. Perhaps, she thinks, perhaps the fragment of the shipwreck story is probably more interesting in itself than the idea of the duel that frames it. In the awkwardness of the growing silence he is distracted by noticing the lucky charm hanging from the light on his side of their shared desk has fallen on to the desk and broken. The charm is unusual, a smiling plastic leprechaun in a top hat, clutching a horseshoe in one hand and a four-leafed clover in another. The leprechaun and its body are flesh pink, its hat black, and where its tuxedo ends its bottom half is shaped

like a piece of coral, or half a chilli pepper. He was given the charm by his father and it has significant sentimental value.

*How did it break?*

I am not sure. An accident nobody even knew had happened. His father had neither carried it safely through a war, nor used it to account for a significant fortune. After a moment, the man walks out of the room abstractedly, unsure suddenly about everything, he finds it suddenly cloying and the woman is left thinking that he has been underwhelmed or depressed by what she conceives to be the moronic, the in fact *cretinous* nature of her writing. We follow him for some time, eventually taking a right turn to his left, catching up with him briefly in a corridor, then following him up a long set of stairs to what appears to be an attic room or a bedroom ready for a siesta. Then, nothing. Nothing happens then.

*What about the space? Is there no light at all?*

Yes, there is. Looking, panning slowly around we can see that there is lots of space under the rafters and light penetrates in many places, including several small windows, and this feels like a relief. Where the light does come through, what looks at first like a rich green shade is in fact plant life, plants that are growing in what light penetrates here. The man goes to a tap in the corner and fills a blue enamel watering can, exactly the kind you can imagine.