

## Tekst 6

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*The following text is part of the first chapter of the novel The Luminaries, by Eleanor Catton.*

- 1 The twelve men congregated in the smoking room of the Crown Hotel gave the impression of a party accidentally met. From the variety of their comportment and dress — frock coats, tailcoats, Norfolk jackets with buttons of horn, yellow moleskin, cambric, and twill — they might have been twelve strangers on a railway car, each bound for a separate quarter of a city that possessed fog and tides enough to divide them; indeed, the studied isolation of each man as he pored over his paper, or leaned forward to tap his ashes into the grate, or placed the splay of his hand upon the baize to take his shot at billiards, conspired to form the very type of bodily silence that occurs, late in the evening, on a public railway — deadened here not by the slur and clunk of the coaches, but by the fat clatter of the rain.
- 2 Such was the perception of Mr. Walter Moody, from where he stood in the doorway with his hand upon the frame. He was innocent of having disturbed any kind of private conference, for the speakers had ceased when they heard his tread in the passage; by the time he opened the door, each of the twelve men had resumed his occupation (rather haphazardly, on the part of the billiard players, for they had forgotten their places) with such a careful show of absorption that no one even glanced up when he stepped into the room.
- 3 The strictness and uniformity with which the men ignored him might have aroused Mr. Moody's interest, had he been himself in body and temperament. As it was, he was queasy and disturbed. He had known the voyage to West Canterbury would be fatal at worst, an endless rolling trough of white water and spume that ended on the shattered graveyard of the Hokitika bar, but he had not been prepared for the particular horrors of the journey, of which he was still incapable of speaking, even to himself. Moody was by nature impatient of any deficiencies in his own person — fear and illness both turned him inward — and it was for this reason that he very uncharacteristically failed to assess the tenor of the room he had just entered.
- 4 Moody's natural expression was one of readiness and attention. His grey eyes were large and unblinking, and his supple, boyish mouth was usually poised in an expression of polite concern. His hair inclined to a tight curl; it had fallen in ringlets to his shoulders in his youth, but now he wore it close against his skull, parted on the side and combed flat with a sweet-smelling pomade that darkened its golden hue to an oily brown. His brow and cheeks were square, his nose straight, and his complexion smooth. He was not quite eight-and-twenty, still swift and exact in his motions, and possessed of the kind of roguish, unsullied vigour that conveys neither gullibility nor guile. He presented himself in the manner of

a discreet and quick-minded butler, and as a consequence was often drawn into the confidence of the least voluble of men, or invited to broker relations between people he had only lately met. He had, in short, an appearance that betrayed very little about his own character, and an appearance that others were immediately inclined to trust.