

## Text 9

I had a secret, something that was bothering me, something that was really worrying me very much, something I was afraid to tell anybody , *anybody* - I couldn't imagine what their reaction would be, it was such an odd thing that was worrying me, that had been worrying me for almost two years. I had never heard of anyone with a  
5 problem like the one that was troubling me. On the one hand it seemed maybe silly ; on the other...

I wanted to tell my secret to Mrs Ferguson. Not *want* to, but felt I had to. Because Mrs Ferguson was said to have magical powers. It was said, and believed by many serious-minded people, that she could tame errant husbands, force proposals from  
10 reluctant suitors, restore lost hair, recoup squandered fortunes. In short, she was a witch who could make wishes come true. I had a wish.

Mrs Ferguson did not seem clever enough to be capable of magic. Not even card tricks. She was a plain woman who might have been forty but was perhaps thirty ; it was hard to tell, for her round Irish face, with its round full-moon eyes, had few  
15 lines and little expression. She was a laundress, probably the only white laundress in New Orleans, and an artist at her trade : the great ladies of the town sent for her when their finest laces and linens and silks required attention. They sent for her for other reasons as well : to obtain desires - a new lover, a certain marriage for a daughter, the death of a husband's mistress, a codicil to a mother's will, an invitation  
20 to be Queen of Comus, grandest of the Mardi Gras galas. It was not merely as a laundress that Mrs Ferguson was courted. The source of her success, and principal income, was her alleged abilities to sift the sands of daydreams until she produced the solid stuff, golden realities.

Truman Capote, *Music for Chameleons - Dazzle*, 1979