

APPENDIX

PLOT SUMMARY: A. S. Byatt: *Possession*

Summary by Michael McGoodwin, prepared 2003

Last update: 18 February 2006

In Page www.mcgoodwin.net/pages/otherbooks/asb_possession.html. Retrieved on June 3 2010.

Chapter 1

September 1986: Roland Michell (Roland) is a 29 years old literary researcher, a Ph.D. in literature from Prince Albert College in 1978. He is researching Randolph Henry Ash (RHA), a noteworthy though fictitious Victorian poet, at the London Library. Ash was the subject of his dissertation. He works part-time for the noted Ash scholar James Blackadder (JB) in JB's "Ash Factory" at the British Museum. JB, who is a Scot, has been editing the poet's *Complete Works* since 1951. Roland is looking for sources to Ash's poem *Garden of Proserpina* [Persephone].

Reading RHA's copy of Giambattista Vico's *Principj di Scienza Nuova* ["New Science", author lived 1668-1744], he comes across drafts of two previously unknown letters in RHA's handwriting addressed to an unnamed woman. RHA refers to how she impressed him at the breakfast held at Crabb Robinson's [1777-1867], and how they seemed to understand each other and various current literary topics such as Hugo's play *Inez de Castro* and the essayist Richard Steele's tale of the Robinson Crusoe-like figure, Alexander Selkirk. Roland infers the letters date after 1856, when RHA published *Gods, Men and Heroes*. He decides to steal the letters and not mention them to JB for the time being.

Chapter 2

Opens with a quotation from RHA's 1840 Icelandic-Nordic epic poem, *Ragnarök*.

Mortimer P. Cropper (MPC) is Trustee of the Stant Collection at Robert Dale Owen University in Harmony City, New Mexico, the curator of a large collection of RHA correspondence and memorabilia. He is trying to possess all of RHA that he can.

Roland ponders the disappointments he has met in life, his meager existence and sense of failure. He lives with Val, who calls him Mole. They live frugally in a dumpy basement room, decorated with photos of paintings of RHA and reeking of cat urine from the landlady Mrs. Irving's flat above. Val once wrote an essay on RHA, which led to an unjust charge that Roland had helped her. Val earns most of the income and Roland is essentially living off her. Val and Roland have a rather unhappy relationship--she is bitter about the menial work she performs. He thinks of his more successful departmental rival, Fergus Wolff, and wonders who RHA was writing to.

Chapter 3

Roland goes to Bloomsbury, photocopies the letters. He consults Crabb Robinson's diary--Crabb was a man who had known all the major literary figures of the day--at Dr. William's library. He learns that in June 1858, RHA had met "Miss LaMotte" and "Miss Glover" for the first time at his breakfast party. Miss LaMotte is the daughter of the writer of *Mythologies*, Isidore LaMotte.

Back at the British Museum, JB, 54 y/o, works with his assistant Paola. JB was asked to edit the *Complete Poems and Plays* of RHA in c. 1959, with support from Lord Ash, RHA's heir. Roland tells him about the Vico, though not specifically about the letters he has stolen. JB tells him about Isidore LaMotte, the author of *Mythologies*, an 1832 book about the legends of Bretagne (French, in English=Brittany). Miss LaMotte was the author of *Last Things*, various children's stories, and *Tales Told in November*. He mentions Ellen Best Ash (EBA or Ellen), RHA's wife, who wrote a personal journal, and a single book called *Helpmeets* (about wives of great men such as Tennyson).

He encounters Fergus, who when asked tells him Isidore's daughter was named Christabel [Madeleine] LaMotte (CLM). She also wrote the strange epic poem *The Fairy Melusina* in the 1860's, published it in the 1870's. He describes its plot (p. 40), an old and oft-told tale about a woman who is half-human and half-snake. Melusina married Raimondin, bears his children, but despite her warning he spies on her one day in her bath and discovers that she has the form of a serpent below the waist. Fergus mentions that Dr. Maud Bailey, with whom he has had an affair, is an expert on CLM. She runs a Women's Resource Centre in Lincoln [Lincolnshire is on the west coast, north of London]. The other expert is Prof. Leonora Stern from Tallahassee.

Chapter 4

Opens with a quote from *The Fairy Melusina*.

Roland has already read some books about CLM. CLM's grandparents Jean-Baptiste and Emilie LaMotte had fled the Terror of 1793 in France and escaped to England. Emilie's brother Raoul de Kercoz stayed behind to maintain the family manor Kernemet, in Brittany, France. Isidore was born in 1801, married Arabel Gumpert 1823. Their daughters were Sophie (born 1830, married Sir George Bailey of Seal Close in Lincolnshire) and Christabel (CLM, born 1825). CLM had a small inheritance and lived with Blanche Glover (BG), who was also artistically inclined and who committed suicide by drowning in 1861. After BG died, CLM went to live with her sister Sophie and wrote no more poetry, dying in 1890 at the age of 65.

[There is much discussion throughout the novel exploring attitudes of feminists to the various women depicted including CLM and Ellen. Blanche and CLM were assumed to be lesbians.]

Roland goes to visit Maud Bailey in Lincoln, at Lincoln University. She is tall, cold, at times seeming hostile. CLM had bequeathed her papers to her niece May Bailey (Maia Thomasine Bailey). May married her first cousin and was Maud's GG GM, thus Maud is CLM's GGG niece (but see Chap 28). She knows of no journal of CLM and of only a few letters, kept by Sir George Bailey at Seal Court, but he is hostile to literary research.

Roland mentions the letters he has stolen to Maud. She has found only one reference to RHA in CLM's letters, an 1869 note to William Rossetti referring somewhat hostilely to RHA's poem *The Incarcerated Sorceress* [is she CLM?]. They visit the Resource Centre.

Roland reads from BG's journal about her homelife with CLM ("The Princess") starting in 1858, the breakfast at Crabb Robinson's with RHA, etc. BG painted "Christabel before Sir Leoline", a title referring to the Samuel Taylor Coleridge poem *Christabel*, after which CLM is presumably named. CLM had become exercised over a letter she received from RHA (one of those for which Roland has the draft). CLM is finishing the poem *The Glass Coffin* (a fairy tale also told by the Grimm brothers). BG describes a prowler (RHA?), and later CLM seems to be hiding something from her.

Roland shows Maud the 2 stolen letters, and she is intrigued to learn the possible connection with RHA--it would change Ash scholarship. She puts up Roland for the night, gives him *Tales for Innocents* to read. He reads tales about a Queen, and a shoemaker, and notes illustrations by BG. The tales are derived from the Grimm brothers and from Ludwig Tieck. A woman gives birth to a boy who is half-hedgehog. Maud feels CLM dislikes children.

Maud is a Norfolk Bailey, whereas Sophie LaMotte had married a Lincolnshire Bailey, two family groups which do not get along. Maud recalls a poem she knew by CLM about the Cumaean Sibyl. Maud had written a paper on "Marginal Beings and Liminal Poetry" [Liminal means at the limits of perception], and Roland notes a connection between RHA's incarcerated sorceress and CLM's *In-Pace*. They discuss how they came to their current literary interests, their educations. Maud offers to take him to the environs of Seal Court, where CLM lived out her last years.

Maud muses about her affair with Fergus. Only in the privacy of the bathroom does she unwrap and let fall her lovely yellow hair--Fergus had challenged her to let it be seen uncovered.

Roland reads *The Glass Coffin* from *Tales for Innocents*. A tailor rescues a girl with long golden hair, trapped in a glass coffin...

Chapter 5

Maud and Roland visit the wolds (upland open country) of Lincolnshire. They see Seal Court in the distance, the village Croysant le Wold, and the St. Etheldreda's church in whose yard CLM is buried. He reads the tombstone for CLM, born 1825, died 1890. The neglected gravesite was tended by Leonora the previous summer.

Walking up the hill, Roland rescues an elderly lady, Joan Bailey, whose wheelchair has become stuck in the mud. She is wife of Sir George Bailey, who arrives soon after. He is gruff and inhospitable, but Joan invites Maud and Roland into Seal Court and George acquiesces. It is a decaying manor house, much of which is closed off, poorly heated and in poor repair, no longer provided with servants to help the elderly couple. He is interested in horses and mentions Tommy Bailey, Maud's great-uncle, who rode the horse Copenhagen. George's GG GF (also Sir George) planted the woodlands. They try to make conversation, and Maud and Roland mention their interest in CLM. Sir George disparages her and praises RHA. Maud mentions CLM's description of the Seal Court winter garden. George also disparages Leonora, who he ran off at gunpoint. Joan offers to show the two CLM's former room.

In CLM's room, Maud notices the dolls and recalls a CLM poem about "Dolly keeps a secret". She deduces this may have been a clue and finds in dolly's cot packets of letters from RHA and CLM. George takes the letters, and they return downstairs. The foursome debates what to do next. George wants to let dead bones lie still. Joan reads the first letter, the final version of RHA's 1858 first introductory letter to CLM. In addition to his letter to her, there is a packet of her responses to his letters. CLM is not inclined to receive his visit... They read the final letters. CLM asks for her letters back, which RHA agrees to, though asking her not to destroy them. George fears a scandal. Maud and Roland work to convince George to let the letters be studied, but he is reluctant and wants advice.

Later, Maud and Roland worry that MPC will try to acquire these letters. They agree to keep their existence secret for now.

Chapter 6

Humorous description of MPC's visit to an elderly lady, Mrs. Daisy Wapshott, who has a letter. It is from RHA to Daisy's husband Rodney's mother Sophia, a "godchild" to RHA [apparently not CLM's sister], and it mentions ducks and drakes. MPC surreptitiously photographs it. This is one of the few instances when RHA displayed any patience toward a child. MPC offers to buy the letter for a handsome price. He is flamboyant and drives a large black Mercedes.

MPC contemplates the autobiography he may write. His G GM Priscilla Penn Cropper received a rebuffing letter from RHA regarding her interest in the occult and spirit communications, etc. He muses on the writings of RHA, including *Ragnarök* and the love poem sequence *Ask to Embla*. MPC has written *The Great Ventriloquist*, RHA's biography. He recalls RHA's visit to France with his new bride Ellen in 1848, to the Fontaine de Vaucluse and the source of the Sorgue (a site Petrarch is said to have lived at after the death of Laura [de Sade, in 1348], the lovely married woman with golden hair described in his sonnets).

Like Petrarch's Laura and Dante's Beatrice, MPC believes Embla represents a real woman in RHA's life. He ponders Ellen's reluctance to marry RHA and her father's doubts about him--she was 36 when she married him. He recalls how Victorian men turned to the underworld of prostitutes to satisfy their urges--did the prim Ellen satisfy the sensual RHA reflected in this poem, or did she hide a more passionate nature, or did RHA simply sublimate his desires?

MPC calls to set up a meeting with Miss Beatrice Nest Ph.D.

Chapter 7

Miss Beatrice Nest is like a large-breasted Fafnir, guarding her hoard of Ellen Best Ash's papers, which she has been charged with editing on the advice of her mentor, Professor Bengtsson. Ellen wrote a journal, and Roland arrives ahead of MPC to view it. Beatrice reluctantly allows him to. Ellen had read *The Fairy Melusina* in 1872 and made an entry to this effect. Beatrice mentions to MPC what Roland is researching, and MPC recalls a pale photo of CLM in the Stant collection.

Roland reads on, finds Ellen admiringly describing *The Fairy Melusina* as truly original, etc., an unexpected attitude regarding a woman who may have been RHA's mistress. Ellen believes she has at least not prevented her husband's genius, even if she has not facilitated it.

Back home, Roland finds a letter from Joan Bailey permitting Maud and him to review the letters they hold. Val arrives in a Porsche driven by Euan MacIntyre, a solicitor who has provided her work and is taking a fancy to her.

Chapter 8

Roland and Maud go over the letters in Sir George Bailey's cold library. He is annoyed at Maud's terms--she will read CLM's letters and he will read RHA's. RHA seems to have read Christabel's insect poems. He seems to have been under stress.

The individual letters are quoted. CLM is concerned about their letters being seen by others. RHA speaks of her intelligence, the nature of poetry versus novels, her work *The Drowned City* (on the drowned City of Is/Ys, which Queen Dahud, the sorceress, ruled). Maud explains this was a Breton legend like *The Standing Stones*.

Back at her flat, Maud learns by letter that Leonora Stern is coming. CLM's riddle about an Egg and her need for solitude is quoted. Fergus has also written Maud, saying Roland is not in her class, wants to consult her archives about a "siege-paper" he wishes to write, asks if she has read Lacan [Jacques Lacan, a French Freudian psychoanalyst 1901-1981]. Leonora's letter refers to her interest in female imagery and CLM's lesbian sexuality in *Melusina* and *Drowned City*, of water, milk and amniotic fluid, etc. She wants Maud to present a paper to the Sapphic society.

Next day at Seal Court, she visits the winter garden which CLM had loved, sees no fish in the pond described by CLM. It is snowing. Maud and Roland are unable to return to town, and are invited to stay the night. Joan speaks of Maud's beauty, but Roland mentions Val as his girlfriend. They go upstairs, Maud is wary of Roland, undresses in the bathroom, he tries to look through the keyhole to see if it is occupied, she is startled by him--she has let down her hair (thus now undisguised, as in *Melusina*).

Chapter 9

CLM's story *The Threshold* is quoted. The Childe [youth of gentle birth] encounters three bonecracking whiteladies. He chooses the 3rd, who has only a lead casket, and he will go with her. The standing stones in the moor lead to a descending track...

Chapter 10

More of the letters between RHA and CLM are read by Roland and Maud.

RHA sends her a poem. Comments about her metaphor of entrapment. He wants to write a poem on insect life and the life of Jan Swammerdam [1637-1680, Dutch naturalist and microscopist, author of *Historia Generalis Insectorum* on the natural history and metamorphosis of insects, said in this novel to be the inventor of the microscope]. He speaks of her Fairy project.

CLM demurs, says she lives quietly, neither calls nor receives calls, has read all his poems. His poem *Ragnarök* was the cause of a crisis in her simple religious faith, in making Holy Scripture like any other Wonder Tale. She wants to write an epic poem. She encloses 2 poems, "Metamorphosis" (about a butterfly) and "Psyche" (ants).

RHA speaks of his religious views as reflected in *Ragnarök*, of Odin as the Wanderer, etc. He is not an atheist. He encourages her to write her epic.

CLM is full of doubt, again asks him about Christianity, cites his Lazarus poem *Déjà-vu or the Second Sight*, speaks of séances at Mrs. Lees, ...

RHA is only sure of the life of the Imagination (like Keats).

CLM speaks again of Jesus, the poetry of the King James Bible, a lecture she attended on Spiritual Manifestations... She wants him to leave her alone with her simple faith, or she will be a Lost Soul, her autonomy is threatened. She ponders whether to ask him not to write again.

RHA is relieved she has not actually asked him not to write. He asks about her Melusine epic.

CLM says she has been sick, as has Blanche, mentions her Dog Tray... She tells how the Melusina project began, how her father told her the tale of Mélusine. He had hoped to be a French Grimm. The Druids, Menhirs, Dolmens, Dames Blanches (whiteladies). Sophie had no interest in these things. CLM had learned French, Latin, Greek, Breton, and German. The nature of the fairy Melusine, her progeny...

RHA has nearly finished *Swammerdam*. He wants to know why her father named her Christabel, was it after Coleridge's unfinished poem *Christabel*? He wanted to hear from Coleridge how it ended (though he is now dead). He praises her Melusina concept.

CLM met Coleridge only as an infant. Coleridge had said her name was beautiful, rested his hand on her golden curls, hoped her name would not be an ill omen, implying the heroine was destined for tribulation. More about Melusina and *Tales Told in November*...

RHA has been to Richmond Park and imagines CLM's home and hopes to see it...

CLM is worried about what the world and his wife will say and wants to end their conversation.

RHA argues they can correspond as poets rather than as man and woman.

CLM wants her freedom even from him. *Bethany* is her cottage. She and her companion BG have a pact to live the life of the Mind, renounce the outside world. He is a threat to her quiet world.

RHA is distressed that he has not heard from her, though he sent *Swammerdam* to her.

CLM says his letter and poem did not reach her, it was taken by Blanche. She wants to walk with him in Richmond Park to make it up to him.

RHA recalls meeting her in the park. They are now corresponding via an alternate address, a type of subterfuge.

CLM again speaks about Mrs. Lees' séances.

RHA describes to her how magnets are naturally attracted. He professes his love for her.

CLM cannot let him burn her up. She wants her solitude, not a limited combustion with him.

RHA follows up on the metaphor of combustion.

CLM has met with him again, will meet with him, is in love.

RHA has been to her house, loves his wife and also her, recognizes he is betraying his wife.

... [More professions of love by both.]

RHA speaks of a journey originally planned with his naturalist friend Francis Tugwell, but Tugwell has backed out and now RHA invites her to come.

CLM has decided to join him.

Chapter 11

RHA's poem *Swammerdam* is quoted.

Chapter 12

Begins with a furtive poem by CLM.

Maud and Roland have come to Bethany in Richmond, CLM's former house, now restored. Maud suspects CLM accompanied RHA to North Yorkshire in June 1859 on his natural history expedition. RHA was gone for a month, ostensibly traveling alone, after Tugwell backed out. RHA's writing then was influenced by Darwin's *The Origin of Species*, published 1859.

Letters from RHA to Ellen during his trip are quoted. He tells her of his steady love. He speaks of the Development Theory (of Darwin), and Lyell's *Principles of Geology*. His letter mentions "This genial Hob cures the whooping cough". Roland notes MPC has traced this trip in detail, but was unaware he had a companion.

Blanche died in June 1860, drowning herself. She left a note saying she could not pay her debts and was now superfluous. Roland and Maud do not know what happened to CLM during the year leading up to Blanche's death, but one of her notes mentions a Hob who cures whooping cough. They decide to review Ellen's journal to see if they can find an indication of CLM's presence with RHA on his trip.

Maud tries to contact Roland, gets Val. Val resents this, thinks she Val is superfluous.

Roland and Maud meet with Beatrice to review Ellen's journal for June 1859: Ellen senses something seems amiss with her servant Bertha. Patience, her sister, arrives with her children. Bertha is increasingly sullen...something ails her. She has sinned, is pregnant, and must be let go. She will not name the father [we never learn who the father is]. Ellen ponders with ironic reflection the freedom in chess of the Queen compared to the King. She receives a jet brooch and a poem from RHA. She receives a letter from a stranger woman [BG] asking for an interview, then another. Finally Ellen and BG meet, Ellen writes "that matter is now I hope quite at an end and wholly cleared up." RHA is not a divine being. Bertha slips out in the night, who has she gone to? Laying in bed all day, Ellen resolves to be quick and lively when RHA returns.

They find a letter to Ellen from Blanche Glover, the woman who insisted on meeting with her regarding "a matter of life and death". In another letter, Ellen has kept BG's "Evidence". Was this *Swammerdam*?

Fergus comes upon Maud at Blackadder's, pries into what she has been up to, warns her that he will find out on his own.

Roland and Maud meet, discuss the coincidences in the Yorkshire setting and what RHA and CLM have written during June 1859 regarding City of Is, the Hob, water and stones, waterfalls, fountains, etc. They note an identical line in *Melusina* and *Ask to Embla*. The search for proof that the lovers were in Yorkshire is starting to possess Maud.

Chapter 13

Begins with excerpt from *Ragnarök*.

Maud and Roland have come to the Yorkshire seaside. Roland reads Leonora's description of CLM's landscape, watery beings, Dahud and the Fairy Melusina, sexual imagery, etc., while Maud reads Cropper's account of RHA's Yorkshire trip. Cropper suggests that RHA was having a mid-life crisis, seeing decay and decline, etc. Maud ponders the moon...

They note passages about gloves in RHA and CLM...

A letter from RHA on Whitby, his visit to stores selling carved jet (lignite). He has sent her a piece of jet jewelry and a poem. Bracelets with hair... The shopkeeper notes Maud's jet hair brooch, says it is by a noted artist Isaac Greenberg, predates 1861. Maud lets her bundled golden hair fall when she hands over the brooch. She has apparently inherited this brooch from CLM.

Chapter 14

Another letter from RHA to Ellen. Roland and Maud explore the creeks and pools of the area. They go to Boggle Hole. Roland and Maud discuss returning, his failed relationship with Val. Roland suggests she let her hair out from its constant covering, and she complies.

Chapter 15

Description of the railway trip of RHA and CLM to Yorkshire. They are traveling together, she agrees she should behave as if his wife. He gives her a ring. They check into lodgings. They walk by the sea, and she asks if they have seals and selkies there. At the lodge, she is calm. They go upstairs, and he takes her in his arms in bed, she opens herself to him. Her passion and adeptness in love making surprises him--and he wonders at her past experiences. But there are elltale signs she was a virgin. She knows she is not safe being there with him. They go to Boggle Hole, view the ammonites.

Chapter 16

Quotes the Proem to *The Fairy Melusine* [spelling of this name is inconsistent].

Chapter 17

JB works on RHA's *Mummy Possesst*, of 1863, about séances. Fergus is looking for Maud and Roland, mentions to JB Roland's new discovery having to do with CLM. He next visits Val looking for Roland.

MPC is with Hildebrand Ash, son of Baron Ash. Fergus meets MPC--Fergus wants to know what Roland has discovered and tweaks MPC's curiosity.

Chapter 18

Poem about gloves by CLM.

Maud reads Blanche's suicide note: Blanche gives away her jet Friendship brooch from CLM. She has little good to say about CLM.

Roland and Maud wonder what happened between June 1859 and summer 1860, about which there are few clues.

Leonora Stern arrives to stay and sweeps up Maud in her arms... She has received a letter from a young French scholar, Dr. Ariane Le Minier, about CLM. It describes a letter from Sabine de Kercoz in the 1860's to a cousin about her relation, CLM.

Sabine's letter tells of the arrival of CLM on a stormy night.

Maud phones Roland.

MPC nearly runs down Maud and Leonora in the street. He goes to Seal Court, persuades Sir George to put down his gun, entices him with the prospects of big money for his letters.

George accosts Maud, accuses her of not mentioning the potential value of the letters. Leonora is tactless with him.

Solicitor Toby Byng call JB, wants to know the value of certain letters.

Paola calls for Roland to warn him that JB is searching for him about the letters...

Maud and Roland decide to flee to Brittany.

Chapter 19

Opens with a quote from *City of Is*.

Maud and Roland are aboard a ship to France. They muse on the sea phosphorescent with herring semen, which Michelet has likened to a sea of milk.

Ashore, they meet with Dr. Ariane Le Minier in order to view Sabine de Kercoz's papers. They discuss Finistère (the western end of Brittany/Bretagne), the Bay of the Dead (under which Is is said to lie), etc.

They read Sabine's journal: It begins in October 1859. CLM is taken in by Sabine's father Raoul, Baron de Kercoz. Their manor is named Kernemet. Sabine's mother is dead. She is 20 y/o. CLM arrived in a storm with dog Tray (named from King Lear), half-fainting, asking for Sanctuary. Her hair is silvery-fair in color, her face white. The house servant/nurse Gode predicts she will get stronger. Sabine has written down the story of Is or Ys, asks CLM to read it...They discuss poetic things... CLM writes no letters, hears from no one. On Nov. 1 (Toussaint), Sabine's father tells the story of Merlin and Vivien... The next night, Gode tells a ghostly tale of the Baie des Trépassés, of the love between a sailor and the miller's daughter, how he marries the smith's daughter instead, how a tiny naked child dancing leads the miller's daughter over a cliff, etc. CLM turns pale from this story. Sabine begins to dislike her. By Christmas, it is becoming apparent CLM is pregnant. CLM never mentions it though, seems a little mad. Even Sabine's father cannot get CLM to speak of it. On April 30, CLM goes missing for 2 days. Sabine and her father inquire at the Convent of St. Anne, but she is not there according to the Mother Superior. On May 8, CLM returns, no longer pregnant. She will not speak of the child, and Raoul and Sabine wonder intensely about this. Has she killed it? A note arrives from Michelet (a friend of RHA) to CLM--RHA is looking for her--but she does not read his letter. The journal ends. Ariane's note to Leonora tells of how Sabine died.

Poems left behind by CLM at Kernemet tell of a Lady bearing Pain, seems to imply the death of a child, spilt milk.

Chapter 20

A poem from CLM seems to speak of death.

MPC is trying to persuade George Bailey to give him the letters, giving a lecture. The letter from CLM to Mrs. Priscilla Penn Cropper regarding séances, etc., appears to show a derangement. MPC recalls how RHA had a "Gaza exploit" at a séance at Mrs. Lees. MPC wonders if CLM was also present at that séance. JB reads Mrs. Lees' book on séances, *The Shadowy Portal*. Mrs. Lees' and Miss Judge's description of RHA's "Gaza Exploit". Miss LaMotte was present at this séance, and during it we hear voices say "There is no child", "Remember the stones". RHA cries out "You shall not escape me", rushes to CLM, seizes her and demands "Where is the child Tell me what they have done with the child?" CLM faints and is unconscious for 2 days.

JB is trying to insure that the Ash-LaMotte papers will be kept in England, contrary to Market Forces. He appears on a television interview to make this appeal, along with Leonora Stern. Leonora tells him she believes she knows where Maud and Roland have gone, and they go to have a drink to talk this over.

Chapter 21

A quotation from RHA's *Mummy Possesst*, containing references to a drowned world, Actinia (a genus of sea anemone), "I held your fainting form against my breast", the Countess of Claregrove who has lost her child...

Chapter 22

Val is at the horse races in Newmarket with her new boyfriend Euan MacIntyre. Euan has a syndicate connection with the winning horse Reverberator. Toby Byng joins them, and mentions his legal involvement in the wrangling over the Ash-LaMotte correspondence. They discuss legal copyright and ownership issues.

Chapter 23

Roland and Maud are in the 3rd week of the Brittany trip, at the Baie des Trépassés, holding hands, viewing the Ile de Sein, discussing its meanings, pondering CLM's Queen of the Drowned City, Dahud. They spot Leonora and JB and flee, aware that they must have talked to Ariane. They are confused about their apparently growing love relationship, and cannot verbalize it--their actions are driven in part by the fate of the dead poets, on whom they are focusing their discussion. They discuss the images of spilt milk and apparently dead child (p. 454), wonder if CLM killed her child. CLM had stayed with friends in London in the early 1860's. Maud and Roland distrust romantic love, sleep side by side, but avoid sexual contact or any direct discussion about where this might be going.

JB and Leonora arrive at their hotel, she aggressively runs into MPC's Mercedes, damaging its bumper. MPC tells them that Maud and Roland have checked out. MPC dines with JB and Leonora--he says he intends to learn what happened to the child, while JB wishes RHA and CLM to rest in peace. Leonora invites JB up to her room, but he declines. The next day, they compare MPC to the Ankou [in Brittany legend, the personification of death who comes to collect the souls of passed-over humans].

Chapter 24

October. Maud is back in Lincoln, and Roland is nearby. He has not returned to JB, feels awkward about his presence with her. Euan MacIntyre calls him up, and the three meet with Val and Toby Byng. Val plans to marry Euan and appears very happy. They discuss copyright and ownership issues. They recall that after CLM died, Sophie sent a packet of CLM's papers and poems to Sophie's daughter May. May married her first cousin in 1878, a marriage disapproved of by Sir George Bailey. Euan shows them a letter from CLM to Sophia Bailey, May 1890. In it CLM says all her books and copyrights are to go to Maia Thomasine Bailey--CLM hopes that May will someday take an interest in these things. The letters in dispute therefore belong to Maud. They want Toby to surreptitiously assist in dealing with George Bailey, who is his client.

Roland feels marginal to Maud's success and family. Beatrice Nest calls Maud--she is worried about MPC, that he has been reading about the funeral of RHA, and is conspiring with Hildebrand Ash to dig up a box buried with RHA in his grave at Hodershall. In the past Lord Ash has blocked this, and such an action would require a Faculty member from the Bishop and approval of the vicar, Mr. Drax, etc. Maud plans to meet with Euan to plan a course of action to catch MPC in the act. Roland declines to stay with her for the time being.

Chapter 25

Excerpt from Ellen's journal, Nov. 25, 1889 is quoted. RHA is dying, asks her to burn what the public should not see of his letters, does not wish to have his things picked over by vultures. She recalls their "foolish years of separation." [was this after the affair?]

Excerpt from MPC's book: Mentions that the burial site of RHA contains a box laid in by Ellen of "our letters and mementoes", "too dear to burn, too precious ever to expose to the public view". She was buried in the same site 4 years later. MPC mentions Rosetti's decision to disinter poems he had written to his wife and buried with her.

A flashback to Ellen as RHA lies dead in their house. She says of her marriage it was "forty-one years with no anger", but also "It was all a question of silence." She views his watch, his books and collections, an airtight specimen box. She gathers up a bracelet of hair she had worked out of his and her hair, his watch, an unfinished letter from him [to CLM], a letter to Ellen from CLM, and letter in a sealed envelope to RHA from CLM. She reads the letter to her from CLM. CLM knows RHA is gravely ill, writes to ask her for absolution and forgiveness, says she meant no harm, hopes Ellen will give the sealed letter to RHA.

She considers writing back to CLM, muses that she has always known about the affair, but she cannot bring herself to give RHA the letter from CLM, and she ends up not replying to CLM. In a moment of wandering thought, RHA says "Summer fields...I saw her [this seems like CLM, but proves to be May]. I should have--looked after her. How could I?". He tells Ellen he has placed "her [May's] hair" in his watch. Ellen has the very pale gold hair before her from the watch.

Ellen recalls that in autumn 1859, RHA had confessed to her that he had been in love with another woman at Yorkshire that summer, that he was with her there. Ellen told him she already knew from Blanche's visit--Blanche had brought the first copy of *Swammerdam* as evidence. A flashback to when Blanche visited Ellen, told of her former happiness with CLM. RHA says to Ellen that he expects he will not be seeing CLM again, and that anyway she has vanished. Ellen does not wish to hear more, "it is not between us."

During the last month of RHA's life, Ellen had found the unfinished letter from RHA to CLM. Dated c. Nov. 1 but unstated year. In it, he asks forgiveness for his going to Kernemet (the manor in Brittainy, where he met with Sabine) and for surprising her at the séance. She has been punishing him, and he feels cruelly treated, protests that he acted out of love, wishes she had not closed herself off to him. He wants to know what became of the child. He recalls that at the séance someone said "You have made a murderess of me" and believes CLM directed this to him about the child.

Ellen decides to burn this letter, ponders that her life is built round a lie, that Randolph had been complicit in the charade, etc. She recalls her own honeymoon, the painful failed attempts at sex, his abstinence with her, her becoming a slave to him as a result of her inability to have sex. She has lied to her own sisters about her reasons for not having children. At least CLM had been like a wife to RHA, and was mother of his child.

She places in the box the unopened letter from CLM, the hair bracelet along with the blonde plait of hair from his watch (it is placed inside the bracelet, and no envelope is mentioned), and the bundle of RHA-EBA love letters. She should not have had to wait to marry until she was 36 y/o. In one of the letters, RHA develops the metaphor of anticipating that the white roses she has given him have a promise of richness and will eventually open--they cannot be pried open before they are ready. Ellen muses that perhaps someday justice will be done to CLM as a result of the letters being discovered.

Chapter 26

Excerpt from RHA *Garden of Proserpina*.

Roland is back at his room. His landlady has been taken away ill with a stroke. He learns that he has received job offers from Hong Kong, Amsterdam, and Barcelona. A generous letter of concern has arrived from JB. He muses... The 15 cats are hungry. He visits the garden, previously forbidden to him. Life is suddenly looking up for him.

Chapter 27

Excerpt from an RHA poem.

Beatrice has called a conference regarding the threat from MPC, with Roland, Maud, Euan, Val, JB, & Leonora attending. More discussion of ownership and copyrights of letters. Roland confesses how he came upon the original 2 letters, describes the quest, receives the admiration and praise of JB. They wish to intercept the planned grave robbery by MPC. Roland apologizes to JB, says he felt possessed by the quest. JB offers him a full-time research fellowship.

Chapter 28

A remarkable chapter about the grave robbery conducted by MPC and Hildebrand Ash. They go at 1 AM during an ever-increasing storm and open the grave. His Mercedes is crushed by a falling tree, and he is caught in the act by Roland, Maud, Leonora, JB, and Beatrice Nest. Back at the inn, they discuss ownership issues, etc. Maud wants to learn the end of the story, wants the box opened. Inside are found the hair bracelet, a blue envelope containing the plaited pale hair [of May], a package of letters, and the sealed letter.

In this never before seen letter from CLM to RHA, they find a photograph of a woman in bridal dress (Maia/May, whom Maud recognizes as her GG GM). CLM writes RHA to say they have a daughter, born in the Brittainy convent, cared for by Sophie as if her own daughter, married to a Squire, now a mother of a beautiful boy Walter. RHA had injured CLM at the séance. It was Blanche to whom she referred as herself having murdered--but she was willing to let RHA misinterpret that she meant the child. She asks his forgiveness and blessing. She had hidden the child from him, so he would not be able to take her away from her. She has lived like Melusina at her sister's home (at Seal Court). The child May did not love CLM or appreciate her poetry, and Sophie had required that May never learn who her true mother was. CLM has been punished for keeping the child from RHA. Maia laughed and played like Coleridge's limber elf, singing and dancing to itself (at the end of *Christabel*), did not like her name and preferred May. Quoting Milton's *Samson Agonistes*, CLM compares RHA to a dragon, a flaming presence which caused her to catch fire, and wonders if they will rise again like Milton's Phoenix--she is glad he was her dragon. Walter, RHA's grandson, has a poetic nature.

They discuss the implications of the letter, wonder why Ellen placed it in the box, or why she placed Christabel's blonde hair there? The woman in the photo resembles Christabel, and RHA. Beatrice is sad to think that RHA never knew of this letter.

Roland wonders with Maud what will happen to their relationship. He has good job offers now, and his male pride. They each profess their love. He knows they can think of a way to make it work, and they consummate their relationship at last.

Postscript 1868

Recalls a meeting of the elderly RHA, seemingly by accident but actually by his design, with the child May on a hot May day in a meadow. He recalls that Maia was the mother of Hermes, and that he knew of a waterfall called Thomasine. He says she looks like her mother [i.e., CLM], but May says no one else feels that way [i.e., that she looks like Sophie]. She is very happy. He holds her around the waist. He makes her a crown of twigs, crowning her like Proserpine, in exchange for a lock of her hair ("buttercup-gold floss") which he snips off. He tells her he is a poet. She plaits the hair, and he places the plait in his watch. He asks her to tell her aunt (CLM) that she has met a poet who was looking for the Belle Dame Sans Merci, but that he will not disturb her. He kisses May and departs. She goes off to play and forgets to tell CLM of the meeting or the message.