

POSSESSION

written by
DAVID HENRY HWANG

Based on the book by
A.S. BYATT

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**FOR EDUCATIONAL
PURPOSES ONLY**

POSSESSION

OPEN ON BLACK

A WOMAN'S VOICE speaks, softly, whispering:

CHRISTABEL (V.O.)

There was once a little tailor, a
good and unremarkable man,
journeying through a forest. And as
he advanced into the dark...

SLOW FADE UP TO:

EXT. FAIRY TALE FOREST - DAY/NIGHT

Moonlight. A magical forest of trees. Diamond shards of
blue light on wrinkled, wormy roots. Over the mossy gorse,
steps --

A little TAILOR, with scissors, needles and thread hanging
from his belt. A glass key round his neck. And a tall,
grey hound beside him. He sees ahead --

A giant stone, where a crack opens up. The Tailor peers
inside. And squeezes down inside a dark tunnel. Which
leads out into --

INT. STONE CHAMBER - DAY/NIGHT

A shimmering hall of phosphorescent light. The Tailor sees
a tall glass dome; and a shining glass coffin, on a velvet
pall, surrounded by moths and butterflies.

The Tailor peers inside the glass dome, sees --

A miniature castle, with windows and battlements.

FROM POV - INSIDE GLASS COFFIN

The Tailor peers in, to see: a sleeping PRINCESS, her
breath ruffling her golden hair. In her hands: a box, like
a green ice egg.

BACK TO SCENE

The Tailor -- takes his glass key, slips it into the lock.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHRISTABEL (V.O.)

'... And the little tailor thought to bend and kiss her perfect cheek, because he knew this was what he must do...'

And kisses the Princess. She opens her eyes, full of wonder.

PRINCESS

You must be the one I have been waiting for. You must be the prince.

TAILOR

No, you are mistaken. I am a tailor. In search of work to keep me alive.

The Princess laughs. And the sound of her laughter SHATTERS the GLASS COFFIN into splinters. And on the box, CLOSE IN and --

REVEREND (V.O.)

'... I am the resurrection and the life,' said Jesus. 'He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live...'

SLOW FADE UP TO a silvery BLACK AND WHITE --

EXT. CEMETERY (LONDON) - DAY (1888)

The box lies in the hands of a widow, MRS. ELLEN ASH, in front of a mausoleum. It's a dripping November day, sun low in the sky.

Ellen lifts back her veil to kiss the box. Which she places inside -- a wrought iron vault. Its doors close.

REVEREND

Let the body and soul of Randolph Henry Ash lie in eternal peace, mourned by his sorrowing widow Ellen...

PULL BACK to see Ellen and mourners, men in black hats and cloaks like silk-clad ravens round an Egyptian-style vaulted tomb. Ellen focuses on the box behind a metal grille. HOLD ON -- the box.

As before our eyes, the box and tomb rapidly --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Age a hundred years. Roses wither and die. Moss, weeds, leaves, briars, tendrils of undergrowth push and coil 'round the grille.

REVEREND (V.O.)

... honored not only by those of the year of our Lord 1888, but by all of time...

And as a wind blows leaves, FADE UP TO --

EXT. LONDON STREETS (BLOOMSBURY) - DAY (PRESENT)

The spinning wheel of a bicycle. The spokes blur in a constant motion, giving an illusion of stillness. As --

Suddenly VIVID COLOR and SHRIEK of CAR HORNS --

A young man weaves perilously 'round a worm of traffic. In anorak and cycle clips, ROLAND MICHELL, thirtyish, dodges down back streets, cutting through into --

EXT. BRITISH MUSEUM - DAY

Roland wheels his bicycle to sheds, removes his clips. Oblivious to his trousers splashed by mud. He unpacks his bicycle panniers. Heads through a side entrance into --

INT. BRITISH MUSEUM - DAY

Roland walks down a long corridor, leading through to an ECHOING domed hall. He pauses by a party of TEACHER and school-kids in front of a statue of an eminent Victorian: Randolph Henry Ash.

CLOSEUP - STATUE

Roland stares fondly up at the stern features of Ash gazing lifelessly out over the kids' bored faces.

BACK TO SCENE

TEACHER

... Poet, philosopher, naturalist, statesman, Randolph Henry Ash was one of our most eminent literary heroes...

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

TEACHER (CONT'D)

... whose famous love poems to his wife Ellen are among the most glorious jewels of our literary heritage. From the Victorian age, only Browning and Tennyson --
 (to unruly kids)
 Pay attention, Kylie --

Who stare amusedly at Roland's nerdy appearance, cycling helmet still on. He slips unnoticed down a side stair-well, entering --

INT. BRITISH MUSEUM BASEMENT - ASH FACTORY - DAY

Through a door marked, "Ash Institute: Director Professor James Blackadder." This is the "Ash Factory": A basement of corridors, in institutional grot. Strip lighting, peeling paint-work.

PAOLA, a fifty-something secretary with moth-like glasses, glances up at Roland.

PAOLA

'Morning, Roland. Blackadder's in a panic. Mortimer Cropper has landed.

ROLAND

Oh, God. Did Blackadder finish my reference? I asked him weeks ago.

PAOLA

I reminded him. But you know what he's like when Cropper's in town.

ROLAND

I must talk to Blackadder. He knows since he gave that job to Fergus...

PAOLA

Accident?

Notices his ruined trousers, on her way to the photocopier.

ROLAND

(hadn't noticed before)
 Oh... my bicycle, I suppose.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Roland puts down his panniers, squeezes past Paola into the pantry. He flicks on the kettle. Looks for his coffee mug.

ROLAND

... Who's been using my mug?

As he unscrews the coffee jar, waiting for the kettle to boil, he turns to see at the door, a grey-haired woman, staring at him.

BEATRICE

If you have a minute, Roland...

This is Dr. BEATRICE NEST, doyenne of Ellen Ash studies and Keeper of the Ash Museum, an eccentric spinsterish scholar.

ROLAND

Actually, Beatrice, I was about to get started on those Ash footnotes--

BEATRICE

It's important. It's about Ellen...

Ominous silence. Roland registers Beatrice's insistence. She disappears down the hall. Roland has to follow her into --

INT. MUSEUM - ASH FACTORY - BEATRICE'S ROOM - DAY

A musty cavern of cardboard boxes and yellowing papers. Behind them, almost bricked in, sits Beatrice. Who flings a letter over to Roland.

BEATRICE

I can't bear it. Another letter from that impossible woman, Leonora Stern. She wants a piece from me for some ghastly new journal about Ellen Ash's sexual relations --

ROLAND

With... Ash?

BEATRICE

With anyone. This woman's obsessed with sex.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROLAND

You protect Ellen from questionable suitors, Beatrice. I've always admired that.

BEATRICE

Ellen was a faithful wife. And I'm faithful to her. She needs protection. I'm the only one now who cares...

NOISES in the corridor. Two academics poke their noses in. One, his rival, a trendy young lecturer, FERGUS WOLF; the other, a bluff elderly Scottish professor, JAMES BLACKADDER, Roland's boss.

FERGUS

Hi, Roland. Still here?

ROLAND

Fergus...
(beat)
Congratulations on your appointment...

Downcast, Roland shrinks back in defeat. Blackadder blusters in.

BLACKADDER

Ah, Roland... I want you at the London Library. Come along, Cropper's in town for the auction...

Blackadder whisks Roland out from the room.

INT. MUSEUM - ASH FACTORY CORRIDORS - DAY

They walk down the corridor with Fergus, Blackadder putting on his coat.

ROLAND

I feel sorry for poor Beatrice. Even the feminists hate her now for championing a dull wife --

BLACKADDER

(exasperated)
Beatrice Nest and her bloody letters of Ellen Ash are completely irrelevant to modern scholarship.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BLACKADDER (CONT'D)

She's wasted twenty-five years
looking up every recipe for
gooseberry jam and jaunt to
Broadstairs. That's what I get for
hiring a Ph.D from...

(can barely say it)

... New Zealand.

FERGUS

The old witch. She's the best
keeper of the Ash Museum you'll find

--

BLACKADDER

Yes. Like Ellen, Beatrice is best
behind closed doors...

Blackadder and Fergus swoop off. Roland watches them go,
turns 'round to see -- Beatrice scurry back into her room
like a crab. Obviously overheard their comments. Roland
sighs --

CUT TO:

EXT. LONDON STREETS (PICCADILLY) - DAY

The spinning wheel. On his bicycle, with his panniers and
clips, Roland swerves through noisy traffic, heading for --

EXT. LONDON LIBRARY (ST. JAMES'S SQUARE) - DAY (PRESENT)

An elegant London square. Roland cycles in as leaves blow
from a tall tree towards a vast Victorian library, where
people leave by stone steps, armfuls of books. As Roland
parks his bike --

Some LEAVES float away, tumble towards a skylight on the
library roof TAPPING like birds trying to enter, as --

INT. LONDON LIBRARY - HALL - DAY

Roland enters the shabby hall. Bespectacled scholars
shuffle around in a silent hum. Roland seems suddenly "at
home." All around him, wasted lifetimes devoted to books...

INT. LONDON LIBRARY - STACKS - DAY

Roland navigates like a mole accustomed to the dark through a maze of metal shelves. Hidden stairs and tiny corridors like a Piranesi prison, books piled high: dark, dusty, infinite...

Roland seems to know his way, even in the dark...

INT. LONDON LIBRARY - BASEMENT - RARE BOOKS DEPARTMENT - DAY

Zig-zagging through a labyrinth of books, Roland emerges down in the basement. He knocks at a door marked "Rare Books 5." No reply, so he enters --

A musty room like a pharaoh's tomb, a high window casting light into a cell of vellum and leather. Roland puts files down.

ROLAND

My name's Dr. Michell, Roland Michell. You have a copy of Donne's poetry for me. An 1858 edition.

A pebble-glassed LIBRARIAN emerges, crooked as his tottering piles of books. Slightly deaf, he takes his time.

LIBRARIAN

You ordered it through Professor Blackadder over at the Ash Institute?

ROLAND

Correct. I'm working on the Complete Works edition with him.

LIBRARIAN

I didn't know Ash was an admirer of Donne?

ROLAND

He quoted one of Donne's poems on his deathbed. I'm checking references in the Nineteenth Century editions... just to be sure.

The Librarian finds Roland's book, bound with tape. He wipes away black dust, hands it over. Roland sits down, cracks pages apart.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LIBRARIAN

Doesn't look like it's been touched
for a while. I'll check...

Flicking through, Roland sees notes scrawled in the margins.

CLOSEUP - HANDWRITING

BACK TO SCENE

It intrigues him.

ROLAND

Someone's scrawled notes all over
the margins.

LIBRARIAN

Hm...? Well... it's never been
called for, as far as I know...

(checks file cards, as
Roland reads)

Odd... According to our records,
this edition was bequeathed to us by
Ash's widow, Ellen.

ROLAND

You mean this copy belonged to Ash
himself? Someone must have
consulted it before now.

LIBRARIAN

Seems it was lost in our filing
system...

Intrigued, Roland goes back to cutting leaves. With great
delicacy he cuts open a set of pages, suddenly two old
letters fall to the floor. Roland bends down to pick them
up --

LIBRARIAN

(rambling on)

`... Devil and Demonology, Dogs,
Domestic Servants and... Donne...'

(beat)

You can lose anything in here. I
found a set of false teeth once...

Roland isn't listening. Dazzled by a thin shaft of
sunlight, Roland starts to read. On yellowing PAPER, a
sound of a PEN SCRATCHING.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

And Ash's voice -- deep, intimate -- OVER:

ASH (V.O.)

`... Dear madam, Excuse this letter to a stranger. Yet since our pleasant and unexpected conversation at Crabb Robinson's party, I have thought of nothing else...'

On hearing Ash's voice, Roland turns the letters over. Like a spell, the voice stops. Roland stares hard at the letters, then looks back at the Librarian. Concealing the letters from view.

Warily, Roland turns the letters over again. As Roland reads the next passage, his expression changes to wonder.

ASH (V.O.)

`... I feel, I know with a certainty that cannot be mistaken, that you and I must speak again...'

He reads on, silently. Then turns the letters over again. He folds back the book to the front paper: A signature "Randolph Henry Ash." Roland pulls the letter up beside the signature --

ROLAND

Incredible...

CLOSEUP - LETTER/SIGNATURE

A match.

BACK TO SCENE

Like a great poker hand, Roland can't believe his luck. Suddenly alive, confused, palpitating, he looks 'round.

LIBRARIAN

Hm...? Found anything interesting?

EXTREME CLOSEUP ON ROLAND

deliberating. His heartbeat seems to pause. Time stops, his whole life converges in a single moment: Life or death, truth or lie, a simple "Yes" or "No":

ROLAND

No. Nothing really...

BACK TO SCENE

Guiltily, Roland slides the letters into his copy of Poems of R.H. Ash. And slips the book beneath his arm, as -
-

A loud KNOCKING sound CARRIES OVER from --

AUCTIONEER (V.O.)
... Sold once... sold twice...

INT. CHRISTIE'S AUCTION HOUSE (LONDON) - DAY

A hammer bangs on a gavel as an AUCTIONEER closes a deal. In a panelled room, a crowd of buyers sit waiting, some poised on phones, others with catalogues: Victorian Literary Memorabilia.

AUCTIONEER
Sold for a hundred and twenty-five thousand guineas...

The tall, handsome buyer, acknowledges the Auctioneer: MORTIMER CROPPER, U.S. scholar, collector, master of the Ash universe. Nearby, the elderly LORD ASH, and his wastrel son, HILDEBRAND.

AUCTIONEER
... Letters and memorabilia of Randolph Henry Ash, including wedding rings belonging to the poet and his wife... to Professor Cropper.

Behind him, Blackadder and Fergus Wolf exchange glances. Cropper acknowledges Blackadder, turns to Lord Ash.

CROPPER
We can rest easy, Lord Ash. The wedding rings are secured for the Ash Collection.

LORD ASH
You beat the Japanese again?

CROPPER
Of course, sir. We have very ample funds.

LORD ASH
(repeating vaguely)
Very ample funds...

Lord Ash smiles. Cropper comments to Hildebrand.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CROPPER

Pleased to see your father so happy.

HILDEBRAND

Money always excites him.

CROPPER

Then we should go. No more buried treasure here. Your father's very frail.

HILDEBRAND

But not frail enough.

Envy in his voice, as Cropper collects the rings. He wheels Lord Ash's chair to the exit. Blackadder and Fergus gossip.

FERGUS

You have to hand it to Cropper, repackaging Ash as a New Victorian. All moral rigor and family values. Pure opportunism--

BLACKADDER

Now Newsweek picked it up, the old goat thinks he'll get a Pulitzer for his book. Hideous...

(beat)

But I wouldn't trust anyone, faced with Cropper's loot...

Blackadder rushes up to Cropper.

BLACKADDER

Congratulations, Professor Cropper.

CROPPER

Ah, Professor... Dr. Wolf... Look at these rings. Wonderful things...

He proudly holds up the rings before them. All look on.

CROPPER

I remember when my father would amuse himself by placing the treasures of his own collection in my sweaty paw...

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CROPPER (CONT'D)

(stroking his palm;
sensibly)
... 'Here, Morty, my boy,' he would
say. 'Here is history to hold in
your hand.' Priceless...

BLACKADDER

Surely a strain even for your
budget.

Effortlessly superior, Cropper smiles condescendingly.

CROPPER

At the Cropper Foundation, we don't
have a budget. Just a check book.

Blackadder, Fergus watch him wheel Lord Ash out.

EXT. ROLAND'S FLAT (STOKE NEWINGTON) - SPINNING BICYCLE
WHEEL - NIGHT

Roland rides up the lanes of rundown Stoke Newington.
Outside a tall Victorian house, Roland stops, brings his
bicycle up steps. Opens his doors, and enters --

INT. ROLAND'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Locking his bicycle in the hall, he picks up a pile of mail.
And wearily goes down the stairs into the basement.

INT. ROLAND'S FLAT - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Portraits of Randolph Henry Ash stare down at a kitchen
table. CATS gather, MIAOWING for food, as --

VAL, his long-time girl friend, sets down before Roland a
plate of lamb and ratatouille. It's reheated, and like
their relationship, tepid, and potentially poisonous.

ROLAND

Shall I get a bottle of wine?

VAL

You should've thought of that
before.

Roland dutifully picks at the meat. Then --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROLAND

I made an amazing discovery today --

VAL

It'll go cold.

ROLAND

I was in the London Library. I found Ash's own copy of Donne poems with all his notes in the margins. And I'm sure no one knew it was there --

VAL

I expect they didn't.

ROLAND

... If I tell Blackadder, I know he'll think it's important --

VAL

I expect he will.

Roland sees the bad mood. Like a storm gathering strength.

ROLAND

I'm sorry to bore you, Val. It does look exciting. I can write it up. It'll make me a better job prospect --

VAL

There are no jobs. And if there are, they go to Fergus Wolf --

Val gets up from the table. Roland dutifully prods the lamb.

ROLAND

If you think what I do is so unimportant --

VAL

(lighting a cigarette)
You do what turns you on. You have this thing about this dead man. Who had a thing about dead people. That's okay, but not everyone is very bothered about all that...

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VAL (CONT'D)
 (draws on cigarette)
 ... I see some things, from my
 menial vantage point in my lawyer's
 office. Last week, when Euan and I
 --

Roland starts to feed cats below the table.

ROLAND
 Who...?

VAL
 A lawyer. In my office... Oh, never
 mind.

Val turns to him. At first slowly, calmly. Then louder...

VAL
 I suppose I envy you, piecing
 together old Ash's world picture.
 Only where does that leave you, old
 mole? What's your world picture?
 And how are you ever going to afford
 to get us away from dripping cat-
 piss and being on top of one
another?!

Roland stares, stricken by Val's show of temper.

ROLAND
 Something's upset you, hasn't it?

VAL
 Seems a reasonable deduction.

EXT./INT. ROLAND'S FLAT (STOKE NEWINGTON) - BEDROOM -
 NIGHT

Three A.M. Outside a dilapidated Victorian house, a breeze
 RUSTLES through a tree's LEAVES. MOVE IN THROUGH a WINDOW,
 where Val lies in bed, alone. Outside the bedroom --

INT. ROLAND'S FLAT - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Sitting on the lowered loo seat, Roland goes over the
 letters. He stares at the handwriting, hears Ash's voice.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ASH (V.O.)
 `... Dear Madam, Excuse this letter
 to a stranger...'

RUSTLED by WIND, with a strange, harmonic MUSIC, the letters hover delicately in his hands. Haunted by Roland's...

DREAM - EXT. HOUSE - CRABB ROBINSON PARTY
 (BLACK & WHITE) - DAY

As Ash escorts Ellen into the house, he carries on through a party, inside a conservatory of Oriental plants which conceal guests playing blind man's bluff. Ash sees a WOMAN, head turned away.

ON that look --

ASH (V.O.)
 `... Since our pleasant and
 unexpected conversation at Crabb
 Robinson's party, I have thought of
 nothing else...'

Ash is drawn towards the Woman -- FREEZE ON his expression, his features turn as if to stone, as --

END OF DREAM.

INT. UNIVERSITY OF LONDON LIBRARY - AT DESK - NEXT DAY

Crisp pages of a yellowing volume. Roland reads the journal of Crabb Robinson. An entry under 1858.

CRABB ROBINSON (V.O.)
 `... June 18, 1858. My breakfast
 party went off very well indeed. I
 had with me: Mr. Bagehot, Mr. Ash,
 Mrs. Jameson... Professor Spear,
 Mrs. Lees, Miss La Motte and her
 friend Miss Glover, the last
 somewhat taciturn...'

Roland locks up, scribbles a note: "Christabel La Motte."
 He dreamily sees --

FLASHBACK - EXT. CRABB ROBINSON'S HOME (RUSSELL
 SQUARE) (BLACK & WHITE) - DAY (1858)

In the conservatory, Ash, as before, walking towards a Woman, turned away from him (and us).

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

The host, CRABB ROBINSON, a mustachioed aesthete, observes his guests.

CRABB ROBINSON (V.O.)
 `... Ash had never met Miss La Motte, who spoke more forcefully than I expected. She is surprisingly handsome when animated...'

In BLACK AND WHITE we see as distant shadows -- Ash with a Woman -- Christabel La Motte -- and behind her, another Woman -- BLANCHE GLOVER, an attractive, but less confident artist.

CRABB ROBINSON (V.O.)
 `... We all discussed with Mrs. Lees her claim to have conversed with the spirit of Charlotte Bronte... Mr. Ash appealed to Miss La Motte on the question of visions and second sight; she declined to express an opinion, answering only with a Mona Lisa smile.'

From Ash and Christabel's smile: Rapturous, intense...

END OF FLASHBACK.

CUT TO:

CLOSEUP

as Roland double-underlines the name "Christabel La Motte."

He takes his slip of paper to --

INT. UNIVERSITY OF LONDON LIBRARY - INDEX - DAY

Standing in a catalogue room, trousers still coiled by bicycle clips, Roland flicks through the cards in a gargantuan index. Under "L," he rummages until he finds the reference...

ON CARD

ROLAND
 (mumbling)
 La... La... La... La Motte.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

"La Motte, Christabel 1825-1890. Poet, critic."

ROLAND

jots down a reference: 719.640. Moves down to related literature. Roland holds a card at arm's length. From behind, a voice:

FERGUS (O.S.)

I didn't know you had an interest in Christabel La Motte...

Roland turns, sees Fergus peering over his shoulder. Fergus reaches over to investigate the card. And laughs.

ROLAND

I don't. I never heard of her until now.

(beat)

Why did you laugh?

FERGUS

You're looking for an involuntary expert. There are two people in the world who know all about Christabel La Motte. One is Professor Leonora Stern from Tallahassee. The real expert is Doctor Maud Bailey at Lincoln. Cropper and I met them both in Paris. A conference on sexuality and textuality.

(beat)

A formidable pair... they have quite a thing together.

ROLAND

A `thing'?

FERGUS

I don't think they like men.

ROLAND

Oh, dear.

FERGUS

Maud runs a resource center up there in Lincoln. Cropper's funding it. They've got Christabel's papers there. If you want anything, that's where to look.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROLAND

I might. Thanks. What's she like?

FERGUS

Unreadable. The feminists are interested in her. Wrote a poem about a fairy who married a mortal for a soul --

ROLAND

I meant Dr. Bailey... Will she eat me up?

Fergus considers briefly. A lot of undecodable feeling.

FERGUS

She thicks men's blood with cold.

ON Roland's look, a mix of intrigue and worry --

EXT. LINCOLN UNIVERSITY - NEXT DAY

The beautiful face of MAUD BAILEY: pale and cool, like a marble statue. Blonde hair up, Maud stands in a doorway of a modern campus block, as past campus fountains and lawns --

Roland walks toward her. As he closes in, he is drawn in by her beauty. He recognizes it, yet cannot even admit it. She is middle-class, beautiful, confident: everything he dare not aspire to.

MAUD

You must be Dr. Michell?

ROLAND

Yes... Roland...

Maud offers him her long, cool hand. Roland puts down his briefcase, shakes her hand.

MAUD

I hope you haven't wasted your journey, Dr. Michell.

With neither a word nor a smile, Maud turns, walks into the faculty building. Roland takes a step, remembers his briefcase. Turns back to pick it up, and has to --

Catch up with Maud, now several steps ahead, opening a door to --

INT. FACULTY HALL (LINCOLN UNIVERSITY) - DAY

In a new building of beige wood and tinted glass, Maud walks with Roland towards an elevator. Young, punky female students walk past, rings in their noses, holding hands. Roland sees no men.

MAUD

On the phone you said you found a connection between Randolph and Ash and one of my poets.

ROLAND

I found a draft of a letter in one of Ash's books. I thought it might be to Christabel La Motte.

MAUD

What sort of letter?

ROLAND

A love letter, I think.

MAUD

Hard to believe. Where's your evidence?

Maud presses the button for the elevator. They wait.

ROLAND

There was a breakfast party, June 18, 1858. At the home of Crabb Robinson. I believe they met one another there --

MAUD

You can never rely on Crabb Robinson. He was a notorious gossip, always inventing things...

The ELEVATOR PINGS, opens doors. Maud and Roland step inside.

ROLAND

Of course, but he has some curious details...

INT. ELEVATOR - DAY

Inside the elevator, Roland and Maud are uncomfortably close together, as they go down into the resource center's basement.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROLAND

... He says Ash and Christabel discussed each other's poems. And met the spiritualist Mrs. Lees. It sounded plausible to me. In 1861, Ash wrote Mummy Possesst after a seance --

MAUD

My Christabel was interested in spiritualism. But I don't think Ash would have appealed to her. His poem is full of hatred for women --

ROLAND

Then it's probably a wild goose chase. As you said.

(beat)

I hope you don't think I've made all this up. This relationship --

MAUD

You said 'connection.' Now it's a relationship?

ROLAND

Between two people. Two human beings. Isn't that normally called a relationship?

MAUD

Depends. I think your theory is way off the mark. It sounds, frankly, a little bizarre.

Maud turns away, heads off into the library. Roland follows her.

ROLAND

I need to cross-reference it with her journal. You did say Christabel kept a journal...

MAUD

No. But we have a diary by a friend of Christabel. An artist, Blanche Glover...

ROLAND

Crabb Robinson mentions Miss Glover. Who was she?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Maud picks up interest. The ELEVATOR PINGS, doors open. They walk out of the elevator, towards the library doors.

MAUD

Blanche was Christabel's housemate -
- and most certainly her lover.

In front of the doors, Roland hangs back. Maud holds the door open.

ROLAND

Am I allowed in?

MAUD

Naturally.

INT. LIBRARY (LINCOLN UNIVERSITY) - RESOURCE CENTER - DAY

On a desk, Maud brings out a box of musty manuscripts. She picks a single volume, places it on the desk in front of Roland. A thick, green, leather-bound notebook.

MAUD

Blanche's diary was among
Christabel's papers when she died.
Leonora is looking for a grant to
have it edited. She's found a
researcher from France who's
interested. But we can't go through
everything...

ROLAND

Then I'll let you know what I find.

Maud is about to go. She relents, giving in to her curiosity.

MAUD

I checked my files before you
arrived. Christabel only referred
to Ash. In a letter she wrote to
William Rosetti, towards the end of
her life.

(beat)

It was... if anything... hostile.

(beat)

You have a couple of hours.

Roland sits at a desk. Illuminated by a shaft of overhead light.

ON COVER

A gilded dove, flying out from a keyhole. He opens the lavishly-illustrated book, with marbled endpapers.

"A Journal of Our Home-Life In Our House in Richmond"
By Blanche Glover
Commenced on the day of our Setting up House
May 1st, 1853."

As Roland flicks to June 1858, her writing is decorated with pretty drawings, slowly merging into swirling, macabre images.

BLANCHE (V.O.)
'... June 18, 1858. We went out to breakfast at Mr. Crabb Robinson's home. Present were Mr. Bagehot, Mrs. Lees, Mr. Ash the poet, though without Mrs. Ash, who was indisposed...'

In his mind's eye -- Roland tries to penetrate a misty cloud --

FLASHBACK - EXT. CRABB ROBINSON'S HOUSE (RUSSELL SQUARE)
(SILVER NITRATE BLACK & WHITE) - DAY (1858)

In a garden conservatory, Ash moves towards a beautiful woman, back turned away from him. Behind her, as Ash draws closer is --

A woman, we now recognize as -- BLANCHE GLOVER.

BLANCHE (V.O.)
'... The Princess was much admired and rightly...'

Ash is intercepted by HELLA LEES, a spiritualist. Who introduces the beautiful woman: CHRISTABEL LA MOTTE, a beguiling pre-Raphaelite brunette.

BLANCHE (V.O.)
'... She professed to like Mr. Ash's poem Ragnarok greatly. Which naturally flattered him...'

Christabel returns Ash's smile. Modestly flirtatious, she is drawn into his orbit, staring deep into his eyes.

BLANCHE (V.O.)
'... This famous poet would have been much surprised to know my true opinion...'

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Blanche watches Ash walk with Christabel away from her.

BLANCHE (V.O.)

'... But I smiled and nodded as best I might, keeping my thoughts to myself.

(beat)

I desired to be at home.'

Blanche holds in her hand a book, with an embossed gilded dove on its cover. Then --

INTERCUT WITH:

ROLAND

Checking the clock, flips through yellowing pages of Blanche's journal, filled with portraits of Christabel.

BLANCHE (V.O.)

'... My Princess is much exercised about a long letter which arrived today, which she did not show me, but smiles over, and caught up and folded away...'

Slowly her portraits change into macabre drawings of serpents and goblins. Roland returns to a page he's skimmed:

BLANCHE (V.O.)

'... Letters, letters letters...'

INT. BLANCHE & CHRISTABEL'S HOUSE (1858) - DUSK

In the hallway, a pile of letters. Christabel picks them up, heads upstairs. Followed at a distance, by Blanche: Her face brooding and suspicious. As Christabel drops a letter --

Blanche picks it up, goes to the door, confronts her with it. Christabel runs upstairs, sobbing...

BLANCHE (V.O.)

'... Not for me. You need not hurry them away...'

INSIDE HER ROOM

Christabel hides letters in her sewing basket, folds them under handkerchieves. Outside, through the keyhole --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BLANCHE (V.O.)

'... I am no sneak, no Governess.
From that fate you rescued me, my
Princess, as I shall rescue you from
yours...'

Blanche spies in.

EXTREME CLOSEUP - IN IRIS

Her eye large, unblinking. Blanche moves back, stares out the window. The panes frame her face. A storm is beginning. By candlelight --

BLANCHE (V.O.)

'... Now we have a prowler...'

Blanche sees tree shadows move across windows. RAIN and WIND HOWL outside. WINDOW FRAMES RATTLE, Blanche's anger mounts. As branches scrape over windows --

BLANCHE (V.O.)

'... I hear him out there. A wolf
at the door...'

Blanche watches as from outside something BANGS against a door. A low moan of CRACKING WOOD. A latch is BATTERED until ready to give. In a reflection, Blanche sees --

BLANCHE (V.O.)

'... This peeping Tom has put his
eye to our walls. Now he peers
shamelessly in...'

A man's face -- Ash -- BOOM! A sudden GUST OF WIND. Windows and shutters are blown in -- rain pours through. A silhouette -- a face like Ash. Then the WINDOW BURSTS open --

Splinters of glass fly towards Blanche --

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. LIBRARY - NIGHT

Silence. Dusk has turned to night. Beneath an isolated pool of overhead light, Roland looks up from the diary into darkness. Among the shelves, a shadow stirs. From the darkness --

MAUD

Did you find anything?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Maud steps into the light. Stunned, Roland closes the book.

ROLAND

I think so.

Alone together in the deserted library. Unexpectedly intimate, even erotic. Maud perches on a desk.

ROLAND

Do you know about this prowler
Blanche was so worried about? The
wolf at the door?

MAUD

You think it may have been Ash? You
saw her drawings. Blanche had a
vivid imagination.

On the desk, Roland and Maud flick through Blanche's macabre drawings of labial flowers and serpents' tongues.

ROLAND

And was jealous.

MAUD

Possibly. If Christabel was her
lover. Lovers do get jealous, don't
they?

ROLAND

What happened to Blanche?

MAUD

She drowned in the Thames, shortly
after completing this book.
Suicide. Christabel was distraught.
It was all very sad.

(beat)

But it's getting late.

ROLAND

I need to find out what happened
next.

MAUD

Sorry, not tonight. The center's
closed.

Roland looks at Maud. Realizes now or never.

ROLAND

Then I'd better explain.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Roland takes out the two stolen letters from his pocket. He tosses them on the table. Maud starts to read them.

ROLAND

I found these. They're in Ash's handwriting.

MAUD

You're sure they're authentic?

ROLAND

I've checked. They're dated June 19, 1858.

MAUD

The day after Crabb Robinson's party.

ROLAND

Precisely. If I can find something definite, they could change our whole idea of Ash.

(beat)

And perhaps of Christabel.

Maud's pulse quickens. She finishes, looks up, regaining her composure. Senses their importance.

ROLAND

I haven't shown them to anyone else. No one else knows they exist. I found them in a book in the London Library.

MAUD

You stole them -- ?

ROLAND

I don't think they're mine, or anything. But they're not Cropper's or Blackadder's or Lord Ash's either. Don't you see? My Ash lived a quiet and exemplary married life. Now, suddenly...

(beat)

A love letter to an unknown woman.

As Roland ties himself in knots, Maud is coolly accusatory.

MAUD

I suppose they might represent a considerable academic scoop. For you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROLAND

Well, I wanted to be the one who
does the work...

(realizes her
insult)

... Wait a minute -- it wasn't like
that.

MAUD

I'm sorry. I'd never have the nerve
to do that. Steal them...

ROLAND

It was an impulse. For the first
time, I felt Ash was alive in those
letters. It was incredible. That's
why I need you to find out the truth
about Ash and Christabel --

MAUD

You know Cropper funds the center.
If he finds out --

ROLAND

He won't. If you don't tell him.

MAUD

I can't let you Xerox Blanche's
diary. The spine won't stand it.
Maybe you could copy it out. I need
to think.

ROLAND

You can't throw me out.

MAUD

Can I book you a guest room?

ROLAND

I don't have any money.

MAUD

I thought you were working for
Blackadder.

ROLAND

Part-time. I also wash dishes in a
restaurant.

Maud mulls it over.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MAUD

You'd better come back to my place.
 (beat)
 You can sleep on my sofa.

Roland looks at the diary. The traces of the faded brown writing. As Maud's hand rests close by.

INT. MAUD'S FLAT - SITTING ROOM - NIGHT

Outside in the hall, Maud collects bedding, plays back an ANSWERING MACHINE MESSAGE from Cropper, as in her sitting room --

Photographers from Leonora, letters from the Cropper Foundation. An illustrated book has been left open for him on her desk.

MAUD (O.S.)

I found something for you. A first edition of Christabel's poem, The Fairy Melusina that Blanche illustrated...

ROLAND

Can I read it?

MAUD (O.S.)

Yes. It's very beautiful. Critics still dismiss her poetry. But I always found it strange and powerful. There's one passage about a woman who'd give anything for a child, even a hedgehog, and duly gives birth to a monster...

Roland looks at the macabre illustration. As Maud enters.

ROLAND

I think Blanche is sorry for the hedgehog.

MAUD

... Is she?
 (impressed by Roland's insight, Maud examines a picture)
 Yes, maybe you're right. Leonora thought it was related to Frankenstein, the product of Mary Shelley's horror of birth --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROLAND

Thanks. I'll read it. Perhaps
it'll help me sleep...
(realizing his
mistake)
... I didn't mean it like that.

Maud throws him blankets. Glares at him.

MAUD

See you in the morning. There's a
train every hour.

Maud closes the door. Roland lies on the couch, listening to her in the next room. He settles down, picks up the book of Christabel's poetry, starts to read. In shadowy darkness --

DISSOLVE THROUGH IRIS TO:

EXT. FOREST OF ARDEN ("FAIRY MELUSINA LAND") - DAY

EMERGE as the IRIS OPENS OUT INTO a strange dreamlike place of Christabel's secret imagination: a dark, sinister fairyland where owls cry, wolves howl. Through an enchanted silver forest --

A distant KNIGHT in armor dismounts his weary blood-spattered horse. Over, Christabel whispers her poem:

CHRISTABEL (V.O.)

'... A draggled knight came riding
through the trees,
Behind him fear, before him
darkest night...'

The knight hears a song from a hollow chamber: Inside a glass coffin, bound by silver chains and sapphire ropes, lies a fairy princess in white silk. She holds a goblet up to the Knight:

KNIGHT (V.O.)

'... What I shall become, I know
not.
But I crave a place of rest,
A draught of water, for I choke
on dust...'

The Knight pulls back thorny briars, steps into the mossy hollow. He shatters the glass coffin, magically exploding into shimmering splinters. The Knight lets the liquid drop on his tongue, and --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHRISTABEL (V.O.)

'... All one long look consumed
his soul
Into desire beyond the reach of
hope,
Beyond the touch of doubt or
despair,
So that he was one thing, and all
he was --'

As the Knight kisses her, her golden hair wraps itself around him -- silver chains and emerald ropes bind his limbs, cut through his armor -- from her mouth a serpent's tongue darts out --

Plucks his eyeballs from behind his chain mail visor. As the Knight lets out a painful roar, which freezes --

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. MAUD'S FLAT - SITTING ROOM - NIGHT

In the book -- A horrific woodcut illustration: the fairy princess, as Roland catches his breath, waking up --

Almost falls off Maud's couch. He checks a clock. Hears DROPS OF WATER. He gets up. On Maud's mantelpiece, Roland is drawn to --

An old photo of a young Edwardian lady. He looks closely at the picture: a bride clutching a bouquet of flowers. On the back, an inscription: "M.B. On her wedding day."

Intrigued, Roland hears the DRIPPING sound GROW LOUDER, as --

INT. LIBRARY - RESOURCE CENTER - NIGHT

In the basement, Blanche's diary lies open. Shafts of moonlight on a deserted hall. A breeze blows, ruffling pages, past strange drawings of flying doves, as --

Past an aisle of desks, walks a shadowy figure, humming a childlike song. Along the floor, LEATHER SHOES SQUEAKING, a soaking wet dress trailing behind her, sound of WATER DRIPPING...

As this figure vanishes through double doors...

INT. MAUD'S FLAT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

On her bed, Maud lies asleep on her pillow. A breeze blows. Maud stirs, something enters the room...

ON MAUD'S FACE

Drops fall like tears. Above her, a pallid hand, delicate but withered. As Maud's eyes flicker --

At the end of her bed -- bathed in palest lilac light, Blanche's ghost stares at her, wet clothes DRIPPING PUDDLES OF WATER.

From her pockets -- Blanche removes stones sewn with thread into cloth. She snaps each thread, hurling stones up in the air over Maud, where --

They don't fall, but float in the air. Strange, silvery spiral shapes upon jet black surfaces --

INT. MAUD'S FLAT - NIGHT

Inside his room, Roland is distracted by strange sounds: The SNAPPING of THREADS, a SOFT HUMMING, then...

MAUD (O.S.)

No... no... no...

INT. MAUD'S FLAT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Still half-asleep, Maud tosses her head. Until Blanche stretches out her hand, strokes her face. Desirous, tender, filled with grief, Blanche leans over Maud --

INTERCUT -- Roland on the other side of the door -- as --

BLANCHE

My dear princess...

Blanche's bedraggled tresses spill over Maud's face. Tenderly she lowers her lips in a kiss. But Maud -- awakes -- a shriek -- the ghost vanishes, and --

Roland rushes in. Maud sits up, sobbing.

ROLAND

What was it -- ?

MAUD

I saw her...

Suddenly, Maud looks up at him --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROLAND

You...

Maud rushes into the other room, Roland follows --

INT. MAUD'S FLAT - SITTING ROOM - DAWN

Maud by the mantelpiece, next to the framed photo. Roland enters, puts his hand on her shoulder.

MAUD

I shouldn't have let you stay.

ROLAND

Maud, please --

MAUD

Go back to London. I don't want you here --

Maud picks up the framed photo, hurls it to the floor.

MAUD

Please --

Roland gives her a final look: no chance but to accept.

ROLAND

If that's what you want.

Maud exits, shuts the door behind her. Roland kneels down to pick up the mess. Looks at the photograph: initials, "M.B."

EXT. LINCOLN STATION - DAY

Next day. Roland waits on the platform for his train. Maud waves briefly, hurries away. The train pulls in, stops, passengers board.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

(over loudspeaker)

The train at platform two is the London Inter-City, now ready for departure...

Roland looks back, sees Maud getting into her car. A WHISTLE BLOWS. A moment of decision before the doors lock. Roland --

Unlocks the door. Gets out --

EXT. LINCOLN STATION - TAXI STAND - DAY

In time to see Maud driving away in her car. Roland hails a cab, gets in. Sets off, following her --

EXT. LINCOLN COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

Maud drives out of town into hills. Her car twists 'round country lanes, drawing Roland onwards. A dark sky glowers, as --

IN HER CAR

Maud sits staring ahead. Almost trance-like. She drives to a place she obviously knows well. Roland follows her up to --

A remote village amid sweeping hills. At its edge, a churchyard. Roland loses Maud's car. But as he nears the church, Roland --

EXT. ST. ETHELREDA CHURCHYARD (LINCOLN) - DAY

Sees her car parked nearby. Roland stops his taxi.

DRIVER

Not much 'round here. Want me to wait?

Roland checks his pockets. No money.

ROLAND

No, er...

(an embarrassed
silence)

I've done something silly. I don't have any cash --

The Driver looks at him. Then at his wrist watch.

EXT. ST. ETHELREDA CHURCHYARD (LINCOLN) - DAY
(FEW MOMENTS LATER)

The Driver zooms off -- Roland's watch now strapped to his wrist. As Roland sets off to search for Maud. He wanders round the old Norman churchyard. Over in the distance, stands Maud.

EXT. ST. ETHELREDA CHURCHYARD (LINCOLN) - DAY

A fierce wind blows as Roland hikes up towards her.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Out on a hill, over a deep, narrow valley, a graveyard. Maud hears him coming, swivels round as he stands over her.

MAUD

I asked you to leave me alone. How did you find me?

ROLAND

Sorry. I followed you. I had so many questions...

(beat)

That girl in the photograph. 'M.B.' Who was she?

MAUD

May Bailey. Christabel's niece.

ROLAND

Why did you have her picture?

MAUD

Sophie La Motte was Christabel's sister. She had a daughter called Maia. Everyone called her May.

(beat)

She was my great-great-grandmother.

ROLAND

So that's why you're so interested in Christabel. The family connection.

MAUD

No. Christabel was so unhappy. I felt she was cursed. I always avoided her. But her poetry always drew me back. This is where Christabel died.

Roland looks at the tombstone. In white stone, a female saint curves round a humble tomb: Christabel La Motte 1825-1890.

ROLAND

She died alone?

MAUD

Christabel never married. She had no children. She spent her last years living with Sophie and her husband over at Seal Court.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROLAND

Where is that? Nearby?

MAUD

Not far. You can see it over the hill.

A gale blows fiercer. Above, BRANCHES RUSTLE and CREAK. Roland picks up an old bouquet of rusting wire and dead chrysanthemums.

ROLAND

Can we visit?

MAUD

I'm afraid not. It's not open to the public. I've never even been inside. Leonora tried. But she didn't get on with the owners.

(beat)

The wind is getting up. You should go now. I'll drive you to the station. This time I'll make sure you get on a train.

As wind and rain blow across the saintly figure. Roland looks back up a hill. Silhouetted on the skyline, Roland sees glints of silver -- a person in a wheelchair, in difficulty.

ROLAND

Look. Up there...

To Maud's annoyance, Roland heads off up the hill.

EXT. HILL - DAY

On the hilltop, a wind blows as Roland rushes up. Maud follows behind. Stuck in mud, a branch has fallen in front of a lady in a wheelchair: silk scarves, hat and boots:
LADY JOAN.

LADY JOAN

I seem to be stuck. Bugged down. Foolhardy, my husband says. Most humiliating. Can you see the offending object -- ?

ROLAND

(shifting the
branch, slipping)

There. It's out of the way...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Lady Joan lets off the brakes. Maud arrives up the hill.

MAUD

Just as well we were up here. Are you alright?

LADY JOAN

I feel a bit shaky. My dog is meant to stay with me. Never does. Useless great lump. Useless... If you'd accompany me to the foot of the track, my husband will get me --

ROLAND

I don't know round here. Which way?

LADY JOAN

Down there. I live at Seal Court. My name's Bailey... Joan Bailey. I hope you don't mind. It's not too far...

Maud looks at Roland, who suppresses an exclamation.

MAUD

We'll take you there.

EXT. SEAL COURT - DAY

Dusk. Rain. Roland and Maud push Lady Joan up a weed-infested driveway. A tall tower dominates a huge, crumbling Gothic ruin, covered in roses and vines. Escaping the storm, they enter --

INT. SEAL COURT - HALL - DAY

A grand decaying hall. Stained glass windows, Pugin-style carvings, rotting velvet tapestries and RAIN DRIPPING NOISILY into buckets on stone floors.

LADY JOAN

Better come into the servants' hall. The only wing we use now. My husband should be there...

Past a tiger rug on a wide floor, Roland, Maud and Lady Joan pass through a temple of taxidermy: surrounded by ancient stuffed animals: bear, lion... wildebeest. Sadly moth-eaten, dilapidated.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

On wooden panelling, a crest of arms: a crossed shield, held by unicorn and centaur. Now faded and abandoned, obviously broke...

INT. SEAL COURT - BAILEY LIVING AREA - DAY

Roland and Maud sit in a kitchen of faded grandeur: piles of newspapers, pots of jam, old shoes, dog food, broken toasters...

Her husband, SIR GEORGE, sits with The Sporting Life, watching TV horse-racing. While Lady Joan serves tea from a china service, preserving an air of decorum.

LADY JOAN

... I suppose we must be related, Miss Bailey. But the Lincolnshire Baileys never got on with the Norfolk Baileys. Family feud.

(beat)

Tea, Mr. Michell? You say you're a writer...

ROLAND

Not quite. A research assistant. I'm working on a scholarly edition: The complete works of Ash, the Victorian poet --

Roland clears a space on the table. Sir George shouts up from TV.

SIR GEORGE

Old Tommy Bailey named a horse after him. Can't think why... Did him at school once...

LADY JOAN

We had a sort of poet in this house...

SIR GEORGE

The little lady poet. Terrible stuff about fairies...

LADY JOAN

Mr. Michell and Miss Bailey might like poetry --

SIR GEORGE

They can't like Christabel La Motte --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MAUD

I do. We were visiting her grave.

Sir George puts down his paper, glares at Maud.

SIR GEORGE

Who was that frightful nosy American female ranting about the state of the grave? You're not in league with her -- ?

Maud kicks Roland beneath the table. Smiles at Sir George.

MAUD

No... I remember Christabel described the Seal Court garden in winter, as she walked there with her dog...

Maud goes to the window, looks out onto an overgrown garden with a chipped stone pond at the center.

MAUD'S POV

A ghost of a hound walks across the landscape, then vanishes --

BACK TO SCENE

MAUD

... 'the sheltered bench and the silvery fish in the little pool... even under the ice, I could see them suspended.'

(beat)

I've been studying her life.

SIR GEORGE

Not much of a life. She shut herself away in the East Wing tower.

MAUD

That's what she must have seen.

LADY JOAN

The east wing's never been used. I came here as a bride in 1929. No one's touched her room since then.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Maud looks through the window, a Gothic tower in rain and wind.

LADY JOAN

We must find the scones. I'm afraid we don't have too many luxuries here. But one has to make an exception --

(to Sir George)

After tea, I think you should show these young people Christabel's room. That is, if they want to see.

Roland looks at Maud, whose eyes betray her excitement.

INT. SEAL COURT - EAST WING TOWER - DUSK

Outside, a storm. Up a towering spiral staircase Sir George leads with an old lantern. Maud and Roland follow with the Labrador, up CREAKING BOARDS; night sky visible through gaps in ceiling.

SIR GEORGE

No electricity in this wing. Closed since the First War...

Roland stumbles, puts his foot through a rotten board.

SIR GEORGE

Careful... Don't want to lose you...

Maud and Roland look up the winding stair: a panelled door with a latch. Sir George tries pushing it, then pulls it open. A wind rushes through, as --

INT. SEAL COURT - CHRISTABEL'S ROOM - DUSK

By lantern-light, Roland and Maud see a panelled room with a box-bed, a mahogany desk carved with goblins, a rocking horse, heavy trunks and bureau drawers. In a wall beside the bay-window --

A gaping hole. A pigeon flutters out --

SIR GEORGE

Damn --

Sending the lantern's light across a mirror entwined with gilded roses.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

In its reflection, Maud and Roland see a row of -- staring tiny white faces propped against an embroidered cushion.

MAUD

The dolls --

On the bed: three dolls with china faces: gold hair, black hair, and a white nightcap. All stare with blue glassy eyes.

MAUD

Christabel wrote poems about her dolls. Here's one...

Maud picks up the cushion: embroidered with verses and daisy chains. Meanwhile, as Sir George inspects rain damage --

ROLAND

I suppose any papers were cleared from her desk. May we look?

The wind blows out his lantern. The room plunges into darkness.

SIR GEORGE

-- Not now. Too windy. The boards are all rotten. Best wait until morning.

MAUD

Morning...?!

SIR GEORGE

I'm sure Lady Jean will want you to stay --

MAUD

But that's --

ROLAND

-- very kind of her.

Maud, still holding the cushion, glares at Roland.

SIR GEORGE

Good. Joanie loves having someone to talk to.

INT. SEAL COURT - KITCHEN - NICHE

Outside, a storm. Ice on the windows.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Steam from the kettle, as Lady Joan boils up for the hot water bottles.

LADY JOAN

I think we should get the bed made up, get some hot water bottles in it now. Don't you think, Dr. Bailey?

Sir George scurries across with another antique hot water bottle:

MAUD

You're sure both of us can stay. This isn't an imposition --

LADY JOAN

Nonsense --

SIR GEORGE

I'll go up and see to the bed. I'll need help with the sheets --

ROLAND

I'll help.

MAUD

No. I'll go...

Sir George and Maud head upstairs. Lady Joan fills the kettle. She has taken to Roland, addresses him affectionately.

LADY JOAN

I hope you haven't had a tiff, or something.

ROLAND

Tiff?

LADY JOAN

You and your young woman. Girl friend. Whatever.

ROLAND

Oh no. That is, no tiff, and she isn't -- my girl friend. I hardly know her. I've got a girl friend --

LADY JOAN

(not listening)
She's a beautiful girl, Dr. Bailey.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LADY JOAN (CONT'D)

Stand-offish or shy, maybe both.
What my mother called a chilly
mortal.

(beat; holds up a
hot water bottle)

I hope you aren't frozen in that
great draughty room...

EXT. SEAL COURT - NIGHT

Wind, rain. A pristine, magical setting. Trees
fantastically hung with ice, a pond glints in moonlight,
water covering with ice. Frozen gold and silver fish swim
beneath the surface, glowing.

INT. SEAL COURT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

In the old main bedroom, Roland -- in old jumpers -- makes
up an armchair as a bed. Bitterly cold. As they talk, Maud
gets undressed, behind a screen.

MAUD

You didn't have to stay the night.

ROLAND

Lady Joan wanted us to. They think
we're a couple. Besides, they'll
let us look at Christabel's room
tomorrow.

MAUD

I could have come back on my own.

ROLAND

You're stuck with me now. You'd
never have got in here without me.

MAUD

That doesn't mean I'm grateful.
Turn around...

Roland dutifully snuggles into the armchair, as Maud emerges
from behind the screen in her bedtime outfit: a sugar-pink
winceyette nightdress over long johns, knitted mittens,
Arran sweater.

ROLAND

Then I'll have to tell Sir George
how you and Leonora are such good
friends. I'm sure he'd be very
interested...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MAUD

You wouldn't do that...

ROLAND

Of course I would. Leonora must have really offended him.

As Maud gets into her bed, for added protection from the cold and Roland, she puts on a knitted balaclava. Only her eyes are visible, peeping out.

MAUD

(getting into bed)

She only complained about the state of Christabel's grave. But she got Sir George all upset. It ended with him firing shots --

ROLAND

Attempted murder. That's handy for blackmail.

MAUD

I've heard enough from you. I want to go to sleep.

Maud rolls over, an embroidered cushion next to her head. Roland lies staring at the ceiling.

ROLAND

You know, in the beginning, they were very romantic --

MAUD

Who?

ROLAND

Ash and Ellen. He took her to the south of France for their honeymoon --

MAUD

Roland, this is no time for a lecture --

ROLAND

I always think of them as having a perfect marriage, no children, just lives devoted to poetry --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MAUD
Just like Christabel --

ROLAND
At least they had something in
common.

MAUD
Good night, Roland.

ROLAND
Good night.

Maud grabs the cushion. Roland switches out the light.
Darkness.

INT. SEAL COURT - BEDROOM - NIGHT

In another far-away bedroom, smothered in blankets and
paraffin stoves, lie Sir George and Lady Joan, fast asleep.
With the Labrador curled up between them.

INT. SEAL COURT - BEDROOM - NIGHT (2:00 AM)

Roland awakes.

ROLAND
Maud...?

Maud is not beside him. Nor is the cushion. The candle has
burnt down. He gets out of bed, lights another.

INT. SEAL COURT - CORRIDORS AND STAIRCASE - NIGHT

Out into corridors, Roland steps with his light.
He walks down a long hallway, reaches the east wing, the
door to the tower.

UP SPIRAL STAIRCASE

Roland walks up, up, up. He reaches the panelled door. He
pauses, pulls the door open, enters to see --

INT. SEAL COURT - CHRISTABEL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

By candlelight, WIND still HOWLS in. Roland sees --
the golden-haired doll. He picks it up. And -- as he
stoops down, Roland looks up to see -- Maud. He gasps in
shock --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MAUD

Quiet -- !! They might hear us --

ROLAND

-- What are you doing -- ?

Maud points to the embroidered cushion: a poem, sewn in a childish design around a daisy chain.

MAUD

I couldn't sleep. I think Dolly is
hiding something. Look...

(beat)

'... Dolly keeps a Secret, Safer
than a Friend.

Dolly's Silent Sympathy Lasts
without end.

Friends may betray us, Dolly's
lips are sealed.

Could Dolly tell on us? Much she
concealed...'

(beat)

Give me the knife.

Roland hands her the knife, Maud unpicks a knotted ribbon. As the ribbons unravel, the silk gown opens up, padding spills out, and --

MAUD

Something's inside...

Among tufts of duck down -- a package. Wrapped in white linen with tape like a mummy. Maud unwraps it, and out fall --

TWO BUNDLES OF OPEN LETTERS

Maud picks up one pile: in handwriting: "Randolph Henry Ash Esq., 29 Russell Square, London." Roland picks up the other, to "Miss Christabel La Motte, Bethany, Mount Ararat Road, Richmond."

ROLAND

Ash's handwriting. Look at the
dates. He did send it. How did you
know?

MAUD

I didn't.

(beat)

This is Christabel's writing too.
Read yours.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Roland picks out a letter, written in Ash's distinctive handwriting. He can hardly speak --

ROLAND

(reading the
letter)

'... Dear Miss La Motte, Excuse this letter to a stranger. It was a great pleasure to talk to you at dear Crabbe's breakfast party. May I hope you too enjoyed our talk -- and may I have the pleasure of calling on you...?'

(to Maud)

.. And the answer? Did she answer?

Maud takes a letter, carefully unfolds it.

MAUD

(reading the
letter)

The next day. '... Dear Mr. Ash, I am a creature of my Pen, my Pen is the best of me, and I enclose a Poem, in earnest of my great goodwill towards you...'

ROLAND

Go on. Please...

Maud holds up the letter. About to read, then --

MAUD

No. It wouldn't be right.

ROLAND

Excuse me?

MAUD

You should read Ash's letters. I'll read Christabel's.

ROLAND

But why?

MAUD

Those are the poets that interest each of us --

ROLAND

But they're writing to one another --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MAUD

That's not the point. How can I be expected to remember Christabel's words -- ?

ROLAND

But if they're love letters, don't you want to hear what he wrote to her?

MAUD

Roland, please. This is not the time for your theories --

Maud freezes him with a glance. They settle on the floor, both take their respective piles. And sit there, opening letters in silence. Roland opens his, reads a little -- then stares at Maud. Who produces from her pockets a pencil and some index cards.

ROLAND

What are you doing?

MAUD

I have some cards. I need to record her observations. It's a system I use at the center --

ROLAND

This is ridiculous --

MAUD

I have to be methodical. We can cross-refer later. Just because you're unprepared --

ROLAND

Unprepared -- ? It's the middle of the night. I want to get a sense of what happened to them, how they felt --

MAUD

Roland, you're a scholar. There's no need to get carried away.

Maud goes back to reading. Coldly hostile, she doesn't look up. Roland picks up his letters, starts reading. Silence. Their senses are drawn into the words, until --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROLAND (V.O.)
 (from the letter)
 '... Dear Miss La Motte, You encourage me more by your permission to write again, than by your wish not to be seen. Perhaps you will tell me about your Fairy Melusina poem...'

Roland stops reading. He looks across at Maud. Who frowns with concentration, making neat notes.

ROLAND
 Sorry to interrupt...
 (as Maud looks up)
 Was Christabel still living in Richmond when she wrote The Fairy Melusina?

MAUD
 Yes.

ROLAND
 With Blanche...?
 (as Maud nods)
 Hmm...

MAUD
 Why do you ask?

ROLAND
 Ash seems to have written to Christabel about her poem. At some length...

MAUD
 Oh...?

ROLAND
 Yes. Quite interesting...

Roland lets it drop. But Maud's curiosity is piqued.

MAUD
 May I look?

ROLAND
 A quick glance.

Maud peers over, sees the reference. Looks up.

MAUD
 What did he say?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROLAND

I don't know. I'm just in the middle...

MAUD

Of course. Maybe you could...

ROLAND

Read it aloud?

MAUD

Just the reference to her poem --

ROLAND

Of course. If you insist...

As Roland starts to read aloud:

FLASHBACK - EXT. BLANCHE AND CHRISTABEL'S HOUSE
(RICHMOND) - DAY (1858)

The postman walking up to their door, carrying the letter clearly in view. He pops it through the letter box, as --

ROLAND (V.O.)

'... Perhaps you will tell me about your own Fairy Melusina poem...'

From the front window, Christabel watches him go. She --

INT. BLANCHE AND CHRISTABEL'S HOUSE (RICHMOND) - DAY
(1858)

-- runs 'round to the hall, to pick up the letter. She runs upstairs, unaware of Blanche emerging from downstairs.

ASH (V.O.)

'... By your writing may I come to know your most secret self, though my eyes never see your person. When I write, then I know... Your friend, Randolph Ash...'

END OF FLASHBACK.

CUT BACK TO:

ROLAND AND MAUD

caught in a spell, in each other's eyes.

ROLAND
How did she reply?

Maud goes for the next letter. Then pauses,
electrified --

MAUD
I can't go on. My hands are
trembling.

ROLAND
Let me find it for you.
(fiddles among
the letters)
It's the next day. They were
writing every day.

Roland selects the right datemark, pulls out the faded
letter, hands it to Maud.

ROLAND
Do you want to read it?

MAUD
Just this one...

Who trembles as she opens it up. She looks up at Roland, as
she reads --

MAUD
'... My dear friend, how shall I
answer? Your inspiration means so
much to me. Yet I feel I cannot
continue our correspondence.
Blanche and I have made a pact,
chosen a way of life. I cannot
choose to break it...'

Roland watches Maud reading, his eyes over her face in the
candlelight. Sensing their deep immersion in this love
story.

DISSOLVE THROUGH TO:

FLASHBACK (BLACK AND WHITE) - EXT. RICHMOND STREETS -
NIGHT

A rainstorm. Up the hill, Christabel and Blanche walk,
followed at a distance by FOOTSTEPS. Outside their house,
Blanche pauses, turns suspiciously. She sees nobody. They
enter their house --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHRISTABEL (V.O.)

'... You will say you are no threat to that. I know the threat is there. Perhaps it would be better if we ceased to correspond...'

INT. BLANCHE AND CHRISTABEL'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The WIND HOWLS. A storm blows. From inside, Blanche looks out from behind shutters. The night of "the Prowler"...

CHRISTABEL (V.O.)

'... The world would not look well upon such letters between a woman and a married man -- even if that man were a great and wise poet. Your friend, Christabel La Motte...'

Down the street, stands a man in black cloak and umbrella, next to a hansom cab. Windswept, lashed by rain, reveal -- Ash, eyes fixed upon the house. Through trees on the window: Blanche.

CRASH -- !! The WINDOW SMASHES, SPLINTERS --

ASH (V.O.)

'... I cannot forgive myself. I have no designs on your freedom. I know too well the unhappiness a lack of freedom can bring. This must be your choice. And yet...'

EXT. RICHMOND HOUSE - DAY

A postman arrives, puts the letter into the letterbox.

ASH (V.O.)

'... Our inspiration is so rare, so special, I cannot think it better if we ceased to correspond...'

INT. RICHMOND HOUSE - DAY

THROUGH the letterbox, the postman's letter falls to the floor. It lies on the hallway, like an evil omen.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ASH (V.O.)

'... I shall send you the manuscript of my new poem, with the ink barely dry, inspired by the thought of you... Ever yours most truly...'

Christabel picks up the letter, only to reveal -- Blanche upstairs behind her. She swoops down, snatches the letter, takes out pages of handwritten poetry. Christabel tries to retrieve --

A struggle. Blanche throws off Christabel's hand, who recoils. Blanche takes the poem, holds it up in front of her --

CHRISTABEL (V.O.)

'... I dare not write more. Your poem is lost. I cannot be sure any further letter of yours will reach me...'

Christabel walks upstairs, enters her room, closes the door.

CHRISTABEL (V.O.)

'... And shall I give up? No, I will not. If it is possible for you to walk in Richmond Park at eleven, I shall be there...'

Out of the window, Christabel sees Blanche leave the house.

BLANCHE'S POV

She looks back up at Christabel, like a princess in the tower. Blanche clutches the letters in her cloak, hurries away.

END OF FLASHBACK.

INT. ATTIC - CHRISTABEL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Maud looks up at Roland, faces by lantern light, surrounded by letters. Roland opens up another, hands it to Maud, who pauses. Gently touches his hand, listening to the WIND HOWLING --

MAUD

They're here with us now. Aren't they...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Roland looks into her eyes. Maud picks up a letter, opens it. In Christabel's handwriting, the words seem terrifyingly real:

MAUD

(reading)

'... This is a moment of madness.
You have summoned me out of my tower
-- and out of my wits. I did not
think you would come...'

The WIND HOWLS, and with a ROLL of THUNDER --

FLASHBACK - EXT. RICHMOND PARK - DAY (1858)

Black clouds. A LIGHTNING STORM ROLLS. Lost in a silver forest, his horse tethered nearby, Christabel turns towards Ash. His eyes on hers, her pale face trembling, she holds out her hand to him.

ASH (V.O.)

'... And then it was my madness.
For in that moment, I could take
your hand... or not. Do the deed,
or turn back forever. I was able to
choose either path...'

Ash reaches out, takes her hand, gloved. Puts it to his cheek.

ASH (V.O.)

'... And now only the one.'

The moment of contact is too much. Christabel watches as Ash takes her glove, slowly unpeels it. Lets it lie limply, then --

Kisses her hand. A moment of perfect stillness. And in that moment, for the first time, we hear Christabel's voice:

CHRISTABEL

What are we to do?

Ash and Christabel stare into one another's eyes.

ON ASH

ASH (V.O.)

'... There is a fire within us which
must burn...'

INT. ASH'S HOUSE (RUSSELL SQUARE) - DAY (1858)

By candlelight inside his study, Ash sits with his books, composing a letter to Christabel. In the b.g. --

ASH (V.O.)

'... I had a plan to go away to Yorkshire. There are reservations for two. I beseech you to accompany me.

(beat)

I shall wait at noon. St. Agnes's Church.'

Ellen hovers like a ghost, peering out of the window. She looks out to raindrops on the windowpane. A servant removes Ash's bag, Ash kisses Ellen upon the cheek. And heads downstairs.

EXT. ASH'S HOUSE (RUSSELL SQUARE) - DAY

A driver waits, luggage and gear on a carriage. Ash gives a letter for Christabel to a messenger. Who races off. The horses set off, Ash in the back. A CLOCK CHIMES. One, two, three...

ASH (V.O.)

'... I write in haste. I fear your answer -- I know not whether to depart or no...'

Besides Ash's carriage, another black carriage pulls up with a white crest. Then as Blanche steps out --

INT. ST. AGNES'S CHURCH - DAY (1858)

At the back of the knave, Ash kneels in prayer. He hears the CLOCK STRIKE TWELVE. Ash turns, sees an outside door open slowly. Daylight comes into darkness. The candles flutter as --

MAUD (V.O.)

Did she go with him...?

INT. SEAL COURT - CHRISTABEL'S ROOM - DAY (PRESENT)

Dawn. Maud and Roland lie together, surrounded by the letters.

ROLAND

There's one left.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MAUD

You read it...

Roland picks up a final letter. From Christabel's pile. He reads it in silence, intrigued by its contents.

ROLAND

It's from Christabel. She asks Ash to return all her letters --

MAUD

Is there any more? There must be...

Frustrated, Maud rummages among the letters. Suddenly, a door opens, Maud and Roland looks up to see --

Sir George staring at them.

SIR GEORGE

What in hell's name -- ?

On the floor, letters are fanned out. Dolls lie, ribbons untied, dresses unravelled. Maud and Roland look up at Sir George.

ROLAND

Sir... we found letters from Ash and Christabel --

MAUD

This could change everything --

Sir George points his hunting gun at them.

SIR GEORGE

Hands up --

EXT./INT. SEAL COURT - HALL/LIVING AREA - DAY (LATER)

Roland stands outside, whistling. Waiting for the taxi. Inside -- Maud descends the staircase, sees Sir George in the hall on the telephone. Maud enters --

KITCHEN

where the letters lie on a mound of yellowing newspapers. Lady Joan greets her sympathetically.

MAUD

Once it's known these letters exist, everyone will be at your door. Everyone.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LADY JOAN

Oh, dear... Sir George has a fizzing temper. I'm sorry you have to go.

From outside, the taxi BEEPS its HORN. Roland waves to Maud.

MAUD

So am I.

EXT. ST. ETHELREDA'S CHURCH - DAY

VOOM, VOOM -- ! Maud REVS up her CAR outside the church where they left it. She pulls out past the taxi which dropped them. Beside her, Roland looks downcast.

ROLAND

They must be worth a fortune.

MAUD

We both had the same instinct. To play them down. Cropper would love to get his hands on them. Do you think we should tell him -- ?

ROLAND

No -- they'd be in New Mexico tomorrow. He's have to sit on them. Or his whole theory about Ash would be blown away --

MAUD

Sir George would be a lot richer. He could mend that house --

ROLAND

I don't know why I feel so possessive about the damned things. They're not mine.

MAUD

We found them. And they're private. They're love letters. I'll bet Sir George will sell them...

A moment passes. Roland is agitated. He turns to Maud.

ROLAND

We should make a pact. If one of us finds out any more, he or she tells the other, and no one else.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Maud comes to a crossroads. Left to Lincoln, right to the North. She pauses. Then revs up, sets off. Roland expects to turn left -- to Lincoln. She turns right.

ROLAND

You went the wrong way.

MAUD

We're not going back to Lincoln.

ROLAND

Where are we heading?

MAUD

Whitby...

(beat)

We have to find out. Did Christabel go there with Ash?

Maud stares at Roland. HOLD ON his expression. As the b.g. whizzes past --

EXTREME CLOSEUP

An intense sound of WHEELS POUNDING a CLICKETY-CLACK rhythm -- a relentless HISS of STEAM and ROARING FIRE, that bursts into a PIERCING WHISTLE -- that tears through time, as --

SMASH CUT TO:

FLASHBACK - INT. TRAIN - RAILWAY CARRIAGE (YORKSHIRE) - DAY (1859)

Black smoke billows in a hellish cloud, as an iron juggernaut zooms on, landscape zips past a window at breakneck speed, as -- in DAZZLING VIVID COLOR --

ASH

looks out of a window, with a patch of warm breath. A gloved hand wipes through the haze to reveal, in the reflection, Christabel's face in bright sunlight. Both nervous, they sit opposite one another. Both with books upon their knees, Ash suddenly looks up. He has been planning his speech --

ASH

Forgive this boldness. What I do not know is... whether you wish to travel as my wife. It is a large step --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHRISTABEL

I want to be with you. I am quite happy to be called your wife. That is what I had understood I -- we -- had decided.

ASH

You must not regret this.

CHRISTABEL

Of course I shall regret. So will you, will you not? But that is of no importance at this time.

Silence. Then from his pocket, a box: inside, a gold signet ring.

ASH

I hope you will accept this ring.

CHRISTABEL

My resolution was as strong as yours.

She produces her own ring, jade with initial "C." They smile. Ash peels off her glove. He pushes his ring over hers.

CHRISTABEL

So... it is done.

Ash holds onto her hand. Suddenly with a WHOOSH of smoke the TRAIN plunges into flickering darkness of a tunnel. Ash presses her hand to his lips. Shards of sunlight flicker like a kinematoscope on his face, Ash lets her fingers fall. Then -- into light again -- Ash turns her leather glove in his hands, smoothing its soft leather pockets back into shape like a fetish. Staring at her.

EXT./INT. WHITBY HOTEL - DUSK (1859)

Late sun. A white hotel, perched on a cliff looking out to sea. As if in a vivid dream -- Ash and Christabel dismount from a horse-drawn carriage. The hotelier MRS. CAMMISH organizes the baggage: hatboxes, trunks, collecting boxes, nets, writing desks. Which are carried upstairs, as -- Ash and Christabel go to a window. A view over cliffs, of grey sea.

ASH

There. The German sea. Like steel, with life in it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHRISTABEL

It reminds me of the Breton coast.
Which is in some sense my home.
It's so changeable. Blue and clear
one day, the next dark and wild.

ASH

(awkwardly)

I -- we -- must go there too. There
are so many places. Even around
here. Such curious northern names.
Ugglebarnby. Jugger Howe. Howl
Moor --

CHRISTABEL

On the map, I saw one. The Boggle
Hole.

She starts to laugh. Ash smiles too.

ASH

The Boggle Hole...

(laughs too)

Do you like the sound of that? Then
we shall go there.

Ash says it agreeably. Christabel relaxes a little.

CHRISTABEL

I should like that. Very much.

Outside, a wind blows in from the sea, as --

END OF FLASHBACK.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. WHITBY HOTEL, DINING ROOM - DUSK

outside a picture window, a tall TREE RUSTLES in the wind.
In a large Victorian room now with modern furniture --

Maud and Roland at a table, busy with piles of books and
notes. Map open beside Cropper's biography of Ash, Roland
jots down names... Boggle Hole.

ROLAND

There's a place on the map, the
Boggle Hole. That's a nice word.

Maybe we could go --

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROLAND (CONT'D)

(off Maud deep
in her book)

Found anything?

MAUD

(looking up)

I've been reading Ash's love poems.
Most love poetry is only talking to
itself. But Ash wasn't. I think he
was talking to her.

ROLAND

To Ellen --

MAUD

No, Christabel.

(beat)

I like them now.

ROLAND

I'm glad you like something about
him.

MAUD

I didn't say I didn't like Ash. I
only thought Christabel wouldn't
like him. I've been trying to
imagine him. Them.

ROLAND

They must have been in an extreme
state. A moment of madness brought
them here, threw their lives up in
the air. Just like us--

MAUD

They were in love.

ROLAND

Of course. Don't you envy them?

MAUD

I don't know. We never say the word
love, do we. It's always sex. We
see it everywhere. We say we're
driven by desire, but we can't see
it as they did.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROLAND

Sometimes I feel that the best state is to be without desire. I have this image of a clean empty bed in a clean empty room, where nothing is asked or to be asked --

MAUD

That's what I think about too, when I'm alone. The same image. An empty bed in an empty room. All white.

ROLAND

Exactly the same.

Outside, a gust of WIND RUSTLES LEAVES. Mrs. Cammish enters with a tray, Maud presses her napkin to her lips, dabs her mouth.

MAUD

How strange.

Instinctively, Maud stares down at her napkin. In that moment --

CLOSEUP

ON the imprint of her lipstick --

CUT TO:

FLASHBACK - INT. WHITBY HOTEL - DINING ROOM - DUSK
(1859)

Christabel lowers her napkin politely, stares back at Ash seated opposite. As a 19th Century Mrs. Cammish fusses at the table. Now a private dining suite, decorated in Victorian damask finery.

MRS. CAMMISH

Your lady wife is looking a bit peaky, sir. Not eating her food?

ASH

Soup. Boiled hake and potatoes. Cutlets and peas. Arrowroot molds and treacle tart. We have dined well, Mrs. Cammish.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MRS. CAMMISH

A spot of sea air. That's the tonic for your wife, sir. I can tell, she's a chilly mortal --

Mrs. Cammish breezily removes her tray, exits. Christabel smiles politely, as Ash takes out a thin cigarillo from a silver case.

ASH

Mrs. Cammish is right. You must enjoy the sea air.

CHRISTABEL

Perhaps it is considered a wifely pursuit. I think Mrs. Cammish considers me lacking in wifely virtues.

Ash lights the cigarillo, takes a lung-full of smoke.

ASH

I care not for such wifely virtue.
(beat)
Will you go up first, my dear?

Christabel stands up, strained but mocking. She smiles.

CHRISTABEL

If you wish, my dear...

Christabel takes a lit candle, exits. Ash walks to the window. Enjoys his cigar smoke curling in front of him, the CRASH of the SEA below, as Mrs. Cammish reappears.

ASH

Do you have a cognac?

MRS. CAMMISH

Nothing French in this house, sir.

ASH

Quite so.
(to himself, beneath his breath)
'Le degout, c'est voir juste. Apres la possession, l'amour voit juste chez les hommes...' -- Balzac.

MRS. CAMMISH

No cognac, and no Balzac, neither, sir.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ASH

(beat)

Good night, Mrs. Cammish.

Mrs. Cammish exits. Ash blows a last puff of cigar smoke, then --

INT. WHITBY HOTEL - HALLWAY AND STAIRS - NIGHT (1859)

Ash walks down a dark hall, past towering plants, elaborate mosaics, to the stairs. Maids dutifully wax wood, shine brass.

ASH (V.O.)

`Dear Ellen... Today I made a curious geological discovery...

Ash mounts stairs, footsteps muffled by carpet. He nears the top, on his face -- dread and wonder. Ash walks down the corridor.

ASH (V.O.)

`... Adornments may be made here from ancient ammoniate fossils, creatures long dead but not vanished. They are jet black, with a special silver lustre. In this very marvel of science, I now see a perfect miracle...'

Two chambermaids walk past Ash, curtseying. Ash stubs out his cigarillo on a brass ashtray. He stands in front of the room, then opens the door --

INT. WHITBY HOTEL - BEDROOM - NIGHT (1859)

Ash enters a dark, candle-lit room. On a chair sits a --

Crinoline petticoat like a collapsed cage, all steel hoops and straps. To one side, a brass bed: Where Christabel stands, her back to him, arms on the rails, in a corset.

CHRISTABEL

I need some assistance.

Ash moves over to her. His fingers pick up fine, long laces; unthreads, trembling over boned silk; he fumbles, drops them.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ASH

I am inexperienced in such matters.

Christabel does not look back. She pulls her hair up to reveal the nape of her neck, downy hair by candlelight. Ash sees the swell of her breasts, as he plants...

A kiss upon her bare shoulder. And with a whisper --

ASH

You are safe with me.

CHRISTABEL

I am not at all safe with you.

(beat)

But I have no desire to be elsewhere.

Ash unthreads the laces. He feels the curve of her waist, her hips. Slowly, as she turns to undo his collar stud, she kisses him on his neck. As in a...

MONTAGE

of buttons and laces -- stockings unrolled -- corset removed -- candle blown out --

UPON BED

Ash embraces her.

CHRISTABEL

Are you afraid?

ASH

Not now... my white lady, Christabel.

Ash takes her in his arms. They lie upon the bed.

ASH

Do not fight me...

CHRISTABEL

I must...

On a bedside table a candle flame flickers --

ROLAND (V.O.)

'And is love more
Than the kick galvanic...'

DISSOLVE THROUGH FLAME TO:

END OF FLASHBACK.

INT. WHITBY HOTEL - ROLAND'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

A pool of light from a bedside lamp, as Roland murmurs a poem aloud from a book of Ash's poetry.

ROLAND
 `... Or the thundering roar
 Of the Ash volcanic,
 Thrown from some crater
 Of earth-fire within?'

Roland walks over to the bathroom. A heavy, latched door. He knocks, no reply. Then opens the door --

INT. WHITBY HOTEL - BATHROOM - NIGHT

The door swings in -- IN SLOW MOTION. Steam gathers in cold air. Roland nearly falls over a part-naked figure --

Maud in a silken robe, who steadies herself on his shoulder --

Roland throws up a hand, clasps her supple body beneath her robe -- Maud gasps. An electric current between them --

ROLAND
 I knocked -- I'm sorry...

Roland briefly clutches the silk. He lets it go, as if stung. He sees her hair -- damp, over bare shoulders and neck. Beads of water, running down to her breasts.

MAUD
 (composing herself)
 I waited some time for you to use
 the bathroom.

ROLAND
 So did I. I was looking for a light
 --

MAUD
 Well...
 (closes her robe)
 ... no harm done.

ROLAND
 No. Maud --

Roland reaches out, Maud withdraws.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROLAND

If we don't find anything, I'm sorry for getting you into this. I know it was my fault.

MAUD

It's okay. I don't blame you.

ROLAND

I wanted us to find something, together. I really did. And if we reach a dead end, then...

MAUD

I wanted this to happen too. We'll think of something.

(beat)

Good night.

Maud exits, closing the door. Leaving Roland in the foggy steam, looking at himself in the mirror -- in which he sees a blurred figure. He wipes away the steam to see a swirl of white sheets --

FLASHBACK - INT. WHITBY HOTEL - BEDROOM - NIGHT (1859)

In darkness, Ash awakes. Not beside him. He sees her over by a windowseat. In a swirl of sheets, he gets up, goes over. Finds her shaking silently, with tears. He puts out an arm.

ASH

What is it, my dear?

CHRISTABEL

How can we bear it? For so short a time. How can we sleep this time away?

ASH

We can pretend that we have all the time in the world.

CHRISTABEL

And every day we shall have less. And then none.

ASH

Would you rather have had nothing at all?

CHRISTABEL

No. We are here, we are now. Let me hold you...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Christabel caresses Ash. He kisses her neck, her breast.

CHRISTABEL
You will burn me up.

ASH
Then let us burn until we are both
consumed...

Ash kisses her. Draws his hand down her body to her breast
--

ASH
Now I know you, truly.

CHRISTABEL
Yes, I admit. You know me...

Through the open window, a wind blows, ruffling her hair. A breeze floating through the room, as --

INT. WHITBY HOTEL - BEDROOM - NIGHT (PRESENT)

A breeze wafts through, ruffling her hair, awakening Maud from her dream to hear Christabel's voice... half-dream, half-real.

CHRISTABEL (O.S.)
... Admit. You know me...

In pale dawn light, Maud sees letters scattered over her table. Then over by the windowseat --

Christabel sits looking out, head turned away, hair blowing in the breeze... through the window: sea spray crash on rocks: the water resembles flames of fire.

Framed in the window with the ghost, the reflection of the leaping flames against her face, Maud gets an epiphany --

MAUD
Oh my God... Roland.

INT. WHITBY HOTEL - ROLAND'S BEDROOM - DAWN

Roland awakes to KNOCKING at his door. Groggily he gets up, goes to the door. Opens it to see -- Maud.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MAUD
My room. Now.

Maud returns swiftly. Roland steps out warily, wondering.

INT. WHITBY HOTEL - MAUD'S BEDROOM - DAWN

Roland walks into Maud's room. Sees her staring out of the window. For a moment, he can't see anything. He looks closer at the window.

MAUD
I saw her.

ROLAND
Who...?

MAUD
Christabel.

Maud moves closer to Roland. Almost touching. As Roland sees traces of a reflection in the window. He turns to her.

MAUD
All my life, since I was a child,
I've seen her. But never with
anyone else. You saw her, didn't
you...?

ROLAND
I'm not sure what I saw...

MAUD
I saw Blanche that night in Lincoln.
That's why I wanted you to go. I
thought it was a warning.

ROLAND
And now?

MAUD
I don't know. You don't think I'm
crazy --

ROLAND
No, never. Not much, anyway.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROLAND (CONT'D)

But two crazy people are no more use
than one. We still have no proof.

Now the ghost has vanished, Maud can see out over the beach.

MAUD

Look. Out there.

Roland squints his eyes. Focuses out in the distance:
waves crash upon rocky caverns, sun scattering light like
flames.

MAUD

You read Christabel's poem about
Melusina --

ROLAND

But I never finished it.

Maud moves closer to the window, entranced by what she sees.

MAUD

'And where the water moved and
shook itself
A show of leaping flames, of
tongues of light --

Roland moves towards her. An idea.

ROLAND

Wait. Say it again. Do it, and
I'll recite a line from Ash.
(as Maud protests)
Just do it --

Now inspired, Roland starts. Suspicious, Maud carries on.

ROLAND

'Shall our hearth's ash
grow pale or spark in
waves--'

MAUD

'... And where the water
moved and shook
itself--'

FROM Roland's face, PAN ONTO Maud.

ROLAND/MAUD

(together)
'-- A show of leaping flames, of
tongues of light,
A fountain of cold fire, self
renewed.'

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Both amazed, as the words coincide.

ROLAND

The same lines. Word for word.

MAUD

They were here. They saw it...
together.

They look out to sea. In the window reflection, flames dance off waves as they crash against rocky caverns. Roland and Maud's faces together in the window.

INT. ASH FACTORY - BASEMENT - DAY

Inside his office, Blackadder is hard at work on a footnote of an Ash poem (Mummy Possesst). He looks up to see: Fergus. Instinctively, Blackadder puts a hand over his writing.

FERGUS

I was looking for Roland Michell.

BLACKADDER

He's on holiday. He asked for a few days off... Never had a holiday before, now that I think of it --

FERGUS

Maybe this was personal. I was pretty sure Roland was onto something about Christabel La Motte...

(as Blackadder
raises an eyebrow)

But it may have come to nothing. Or he'd have told you.

BLACKADDER

He probably would.

FERGUS

Exactly.

INT. ROLAND AND VAL'S APARTMENT - DAY

Val is eating cornflakes. CATS MEOWING. The DOORBELL RINGS. She goes to answer it. It's Fergus Wolf.

FERGUS

Hello, my dearest. Is Roland in?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VAL

No. He's gone away for a few days.

FERGUS

What a pity. I need to get in touch with him rather urgently.

VAL

He hasn't phoned. I don't know when he's back. I haven't been all that nice to him.

FERGUS

I see...

VAL

I don't know what you see, Fergus. You always see a bit more than there is to see. What's up?

FERGUS

There's something going on I don't understand. Yet. You don't happen to know Maud Bailey?

A silence. Now Val is intrigued.

VAL

I see... He didn't tell me what he was up to. He knows I'm not interested. But I did have a phone number. For emergencies.

FERGUS

This could be an emergency.

EXT. SOHO STREETS (OUTSIDE L'ESCARGOT) - DAY

Outside a restaurant, Mortimer Cropper walks with Hildebrand Ash down the street. When he hears a voice behind him.

FERGUS

Professor Cropper --
(as Cropper and
Hildebrand turn
'round)

Sorry to interrupt. I was curious if you'd seen Roland Michell recently...

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

FERGUS (CONT'D)

(beat; catches his
breath)

... I think he may have discovered something. A connection between Ash and the poet Christabel La Motte...

Hildebrand and Cropper exchange glances.

CROPPER

How extraordinary. We were just discussing an enquiry about some letters up in Lincoln --

(giving his full
attention)

You interest me, Dr. Wolf.

Like a cat with the cream, Fergus purrs quietly.

INT. SEAL COURT - DAY

THROUGH the kitchen window, Sir George peers out from behind the curtain to see a swanky Mercedes arrive outside the house. He goes into the hallway, picks up his shotgun, and --

EXT. SEAL COURT - DAY

Sir George aims his shotgun down its sights at Mortimer Cropper, standing by his Mercedes looking up at the house.

SIR GEORGE

Who the hell are you?

Cropper walks forward, holding out his card.

CROPPER

Professor Mortimer Cropper of the Cropper Foundation, Harmony City, New Mexico. I've come a long way --

Sir George doesn't take the card. Still aims the gun.

SIR GEORGE

Go away. What do you want -- ?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CROPPER

Don't shoot. I never trouble the truly reluctant. I believe you may be in possession of letters by Randolph Henry Ash. Have you any idea of how much they would be worth?

SIR GEORGE

Worth?

CROPPER

In money. In money, Sir George.

Sir George's brow creases with thought. The gun lowers.

SIR GEORGE

English things should stay in England in my view--

CROPPER

Understandable. An admirable sentiment. But these days, how relevant is sentiment?

Cropper sees the gap, leaps in. He proffers Sir George his card.

EXT. WHITBY SEASHORE - NEAR CAVERN - DAY

Roland and Maud at a rocky cavern they glimpsed from the hotel. Maud with scarf covering her hair, suddenly seeing Roland in a new light, as she examines the distinctive, jet-black stones.

MAUD

Look at these. All shiny and black. No wonder Ash wrote about them.

ROLAND

I wonder if they ever met again...

MAUD

No one knows where Christabel went when Blanche died. She seems to have vanished --

ROLAND

Then it's hopeless. We still need to find real proof Ash and Christabel were here together.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

MAUD

That could take weeks...

(beat)

Will you be sorry to go back now?

ROLAND

Will you?

MAUD

I have the impression both of us
will be sorry.

Maud looks up at Roland. And as the sunlight reflects on
the stones in her hand --

DISSOLVE TO:

FLASHBACK - EXT. WHITBY SEASHORE (ROCKY CAVERN) - DAY
(1859)

Stones in the hand of Christabel, glinting. Ash and
Christabel are in a cavern aglow with light. Outside, WAVES
CRASH against rocks, as Christabel fills her basket with
jet-black stones. In a playful, light-hearted mood, Ash
nuzzles close to her.

CHRISTABEL

I shall take these home, use them to
prop doors, weigh down the sheets of
my poem--

Affectionately, hands intertwined, she teases him.

ASH

Let me carry them back for you.

CHRISTABEL

(laughingly)

I can carry my own burdens.

ASH

Not while I am here--

Ash takes the basket. She relents, then suddenly her mood
shifts. She looks away saddened, as they head out onto the
rocks.

CHRISTABEL

You know that after these few days
together--

ASH

Let us not think of time--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHRISTABEL

We must part, never look back. It is inevitable, we both know it--

ASH

I cannot, will not. I love you--

CHRISTABEL

You speak to me of love? You have a wife, sir. Speak to me of her.

In sudden fury, the SEA CRASHES against rocks below. Wind buffets them. In anguish, words stick in his throat, tears in his eyes.

ASH

I have a wife... and I love her.
Not as I love you...

(he stops; unable
to go on)

There are good reasons why my love for you need not hurt her. I know this must sound bald and lame. It must be what many men, philandering men, have said before me. I never thought to find myself saying such things. Yet I believe what I have said to be true. I can never tire of you-- of this--

CHRISTABEL

It is in our nature to tire. Fortunately. Let us collude with necessity. Let us play with it...
(beat)

'... And if we cannot make our sun stand still, yet we will make him run.'

ASH

... A poet after my own heart.

CHRISTABEL

And mine. Though not more beloved than Randolph Henry Ash...

She moves towards him. They embrace passionately. From her pocket, Christabel throws a paper out on the wind, flying away--

ASH

What is that?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHRISTABEL

A poem. I was writing it here.

ASH

Why-- ? You... are not happy with it?

CHRISTABEL

These feelings-- I want them to live forever. To survive the few days we have here.

She trembles, close to tears. Ash takes her in his arms. And as the wild sea buffets the shore, WAVES CRASHING against rocks--

HOLD ON the scraps of paper, as they fly on the wind, PAST the tide pools, ACROSS the beach, TOWARDS the seashore, where--

They scatter across two pairs of feet. One in chic modern sandals, the other wearing old tennis shoes. REVEAL--

END OF FLASHBACK.

EXT. WHITBY SHORELINE - DAY

Roland and Maud on the shore. Reluctantly, getting ready to go.

ROLAND

I don't know what will happen to me when I get back. I've got no real job. And then there's Val... I've lived with her since university. I owe her so much. But it doesn't work. Not for any good reason. But because...

MAUD

I had a relationship like that. We tormented each other. One of those people who as soon as you open your mouth, they say another cleverer, louder thing. Quoting Freud at six in the morning. I felt battered. For no good reason.

Roland sees Maud smiling. Fiddling with her head scarf.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROLAND

Tell me-- Why do you always cover your hair?

MAUD

It's the wrong color. No one believes it's natural. At a conference once I got accused of trying to please men. So I cut it off. Now it's grown, I put it away.

ROLAND

You shouldn't. You should let it out.

MAUD

Why do you say that?

ROLAND

Because if anyone can't see it, they think and think about it, they wonder what it's like...

MAUD

Do they?

ROLAND

Yes... Life is so short. It has a right to breathe.

Suddenly, Maud unties her head-square, undoes the clips slowly.

MAUD

You are an odd man.

ROLAND

I'm not making a pass. You know that.

MAUD

Yes, I do. That's what's so odd.

She puts down her head, shakes it.

ROLAND

That feels better.

MAUD

All right. That feels better.

A moment between them. Roland is drawn towards her. But up to the cliff, Maud sees a familiar figure appear, waving at them.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CROPPER

Hello, down there□-- !

Roland and Maud swivel 'round to see□-- the urbane silhouette of Mortimer Cropper, walking towards them in the sandy cove.

CROPPER

At last. You're a hard pair to track down□--

ROLAND

How did you find us□-- ?

CROPPER

A little detective work. You're forgetting. I know our dear Randolph better than any of you. Congratulations on your discovery...

(beat)

Tea, anyone...?

Cropper moves up to them, with his shark's grin.

INT. HOTEL - TEA ROOM - DAY

Cropper pours tea for Maud, Roland looks on. Cropper is charmingly proprietorial, gleeful at his new possessions.

MAUD

At least Sir George and Lady Joan will get some money --

ROLAND

But have you read the letters?

CROPPER

That's not so important. I'll be sending them back to New Mexico for safekeeping. Poor Lord Ash found the news very upsetting. He had a stroke --

(as Roland and

Maud react)

Hildebrand has stepped in to look after the Ash estate.

ROLAND

We can't prove it yet. But we think Ash and Christabel came here. Together□--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CROPPER

Fascinating...

(beat; a grin)

Perhaps. Perhaps not... Of course, if something did develop between Ash and Christabel, Maud and I would be the natural team to do the research. After all...

(puts a proprietorial arm around her)

We have a 'special relationship'...

Roland picks up the nuance. Cropper turns to him.

CROPPER

We already fund Maud's work. And with what I know about Ash... I don't think you'll be needed, Dr. Michell.

Roland sits, saying nothing. Furious.

CROPPER

Thanks for your time and energy, Dr. Michell. I'm sure you understand.

ROLAND

I understand.

Roland looks at Maud, like a rabbit in the headlights. Says nothing. Roland gets up, walks off in disgust. Cropper stops Maud following. She turns to him.

MAUD

Now you own the letters you can do what you want -- why do you need me?

CROPPER

My lawyer tells me Ash wrote a note returning his letters to Christabel's possession. A legal technicality --

MAUD

You mean the letters could belong to me?

CROPPER

Open to dispute. But I'd hate to see you waste money on law suits. So unnecessary.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Maud pulls her hand away from Cropper.

MAUD

I was worried you were being nice to me. How silly...

INT. ROLAND'S ROOM/CORRIDOR - DAY

Maud follows Roland up to his room. She knocks on his door.

MAUD

Roland, let me in --

ROLAND (O.S.)

Go away --

Maud tries the door. To her surprise, it's unlocked. She enters. Finds Roland flinging his books and papers into a bag.

MAUD

Look at me, Roland --

ROLAND

I can hear you fine --

MAUD

I can't back out of this. The center. The students. That's my life --

ROLAND

Good. You're welcome to it --

MAUD

I -- we -- need Cropper's money.

ROLAND

He wants to own everything. Now he does. Including you --

MAUD

So what can we do? If we had any firm proof about Ash and Christabel --

ROLAND

We could have carried on -- I can't believe you expect me to listen to Cropper's bullshit -- when, on top of everything else -- you slept with this... this cowboy --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Roland finishes his packing, heads for the door.

MAUD

Roland, you're jealous. It's nothing --

ROLAND

Nothing?! You're kidding -- one day I'm on the academic scoop of the decade -- the next this necrophiliac ex-boyfriend of yours tells me I'm unemployed --

MAUD

You don't even have a job --

ROLAND

I don't even have a life. I wash dishes --

MAUD

I thought that was a story -- some wimpish puppy dog trick for sympathy --

ROLAND

I don't need to invent things. I live in a stinking basement, full of cat piss --

MAUD

Then you're pathetic, Roland. Go back to your basement, with your books and your dreams and your stupid romantic illusions -- because you don't live in the real world --

ROLAND

I'm glad. I hate the real world. As a concept, it's much overrated.

Maud tries to calm it down. Roland heads out the door.

MAUD

Okay... okay... Listen -- I'll see what I can do. I'll go to London. Stay at Leonora's. Maybe I can persuade Cropper --

ROLAND

Don't bother. I thought we wanted the same thing. Obviously, we don't.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Roland takes his bag, pushes past her. Exits down the corridor. Maud watches him disappear. Behind her, Cropper --

CROPPER

Not your type, Maud. Too weak.
Leonora and I would both be
devastated.

The sound of a TRAIN, WHISTLING through a tunnel, as --

INT. TRAIN (LONDON) - DAY

Drifting off, Roland sits in his carriage as the train zips through the rolling countryside. In the newspaper, an article:

"Ash Letters Rock Literary World" with a picture of... Cropper. The light plays on his face, flickering like a kinematoscope --

As a WHISTLE SHRIEKS and carries over TO --

FLASHBACK - INT. STATION/TRAIN (LONDON) - DAY (1859)

Amid the steam of a train on its platform, Ash and Christabel disembark. His luggage sits awaiting him with porters.

He takes Christabel to a carriage, loaded with her cases. Ash helps her up. Holds onto her hand, as she sits down.

CHRISTABEL

I must go.

ASH

If only...

He kisses her hand. Christabel gives a rueful smile.

CHRISTABEL

I am sad we went walking, sir.
(beat)

Yet sad too, that we are not walking
still.

She does not withdraw her hand. Ash lets it go. The coachman shuts the door. They stare into each other's eyes, as the driver cracks his whip and her carriage sets off --

Ash stares at the carriage. His eyes moist with tears. As Christabel vanishes into the distance.

END OF FLASHBACK.

INT. ROLAND'S FLAT - DAY

Weary and exhausted, finally home, Roland passes his bicycle, makes his way down his flat. In the corridor, Roland finds Val. With her coat on. A suitcase. And vase, in hand.

VAL

Hello, Roland. Did you have a good time with Maud Bailey?

ROLAND

I rang and rang you ...

VAL

I thought if you could vanish, I could. So I did.

ROLAND

You don't look very angry, Val. Actually, you look happy.

Roland looks 'round the flat. Furniture seems to be missing.

VAL

I decided I could be...

(beat)

I'm going to live with Euan.

The shock, when it comes, is a double whammy: he has no idea.

ROLAND

... Who?

VAL

A lawyer. In my office. Anything to say?

ROLAND

Er... I'm glad.

VAL

I hope not altogether glad. Are you all right?

ROLAND

In some ways. In others, I'm in a mess.

VAL

You'll survive, I suppose. The rent's paid until the first of the month. This week, that is.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

VAL (CONT'D)

I'll leave you the cats... Dry food.
And sardines. No tins. And change
the tray. Daily... if you can
possibly manage.

Roland stands in the hallway, Val picks up her suitcase,
exits. The door slams. Welcome home.

INT. TV STUDIO - NIGHT

Inside a studio, a TV panel gets ready to debate the hot
literary news. LEONORA STERN, a loud, energetic US feminist
sits next to Blackadder, in the makeup chair, while Cropper
and Hildebrand Ash sit under lights getting ready.

MAKEUP

Ready, Professor Stern -- ?

LEONORA

More blush, deary, I can take
it --

As an interviewer announces a lead-in, Leonora leans over,
whispering to Blackadder, hand poised on his thigh.

LEONORA

You've got to make your Mr. Ash to
be the hottest property in town,
Professor. Get them by the balls.
Give them one sexy thing, you'll do
fine--

BLACKADDER

One sexy thing. Mmnnn...

LEONORA

I love the way you talk. By the
way...

(hand on his thigh)

I take it neither of us want Cropper
to win this. You may be interested,
Professor. I got a letter from a
research student in Brittany...

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. ROLAND'S/LEONORA'S APARTMENTS - DUSK

On TV screen-- a beautiful interviewer, Patel, introduces
the panel. As we PULL BACK to see--

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

(on TV)

'... The literary world has been rocked by an extraordinary discovery. A panel of experts is here to discuss...'

Alone in his apartment-- Roland glowering at the TV screen. A low moan. The cats keep out of his way.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. LEONORA'S APARTMENT - DUSK

Watching the same TV program, like two lonely hearts, Maud sits on the sofa in Leonora's. She uncovers a letter on a table. A French address catches her eye. She reads it avidly.

MAUD

(reading aloud)

'... I am currently working on an unpublished writer, Sabine de Kercoz, and have discovered material I believe will be of interest to you. Yours... Dr. Ariane Le Minier...'

Maud flicks through Leonora's files. Finds an address. She hesitates.

INTERCUT between --

INT. ROLAND'S FLAT - BATHROOM/KITCHEN - DUSK

Taps full on, Roland runs a bath. The noise drowns out TV and phone. His answer machine plays Maud's voice to an empty room.

MAUD (V.O.)

(on answer machine)

'... Roland...? Are you there...? Roland, I need to speak to you... I know you don't want to speak to me... But I think I've found another clue...'

CLICK -- the message breaks off.

BACK TO TV

as each of the panel competes for 15 seconds of fame.

LEONORA (V.O.)

... Of course, from a radical feminist perspective, it was a surprise to learn Christabel might have loved a man--

BLACKADDER (V.O.)

A complete shock. It's as if we'd discovered Shakespeare's Dark Lady--

CROPPER (V.O.)

I don't think we have to rush to conclusions. Nothing happened. To my eyes, this correspondence was a purely literary love affair. Ash was always a complex man. This only proves his moral stance as exemplary. Until Dr. Fergus Wolf and I examine the evidence--

BLACKADDER (V.O.)

That's why the letters must stay in our country as part of our heritage--

PATEL (V.O.)

(to Hildebrand Ash)

With your father now ill, doesn't that question come to you?

HILDEBRAND (V.O.)

... After a hundred years, some of us feel the time is right to let Ash enter the modern world--

CROPPER (V.O.)

... Now is the time to bring other valuable parts of Ash's legacy into the public eye...

ON Cropper's smile --

CUT TO:

INT. ROLAND'S FLAT - DAY

Next morning. Darkness. Roland lies in bed, asleep. Curtains drawn. The PHONE RINGS, wakes him. Roland gets up to answer it. A friendly voice.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BEATRICE (V.O.)

Roland... are you there...?

ROLAND

Beatrice...? I'm glad it's you. I suppose you saw those vultures on TV...?

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. ASH HOUSE MUSEUM - LIBRARY - DAY

Up in the old Ash house, now a museum, shelves are filled with books, papers, portraits. Glass cases of specimens. Amid a huge box-file, Beatrice takes shelter. On the phone --

BEATRICE

... Yes. Are you alright? I'm over at the Ash Museum -- Blackadder's been in a fearful rage. Says you've been doing things behind his back --

ROLAND

Right now I hate Blackadder -- I hate Ash -- I hate the whole Ash factory --

BEATRICE

He's screaming for a copy of Mrs. Lees's book, with a description of the Ash seance --

ROLAND

The seance? Why?

BEATRICE

Cropper's onto something. He's checking up on Ash's whereabouts in 1860. He's desperate. My filing system is his last hope. I can't find a copy anywhere. Maybe you could help --

ROLAND

Hmm... I don't know... It's called The Shadowy Portal, isn't it?

Roland looks distractedly at his piles of books. Around the apartment, books on shelves. On window ledges. In boxes...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BEATRICE

Yes. Call me if you have a brainwave. My life will be miserable otherwise.

ROLAND

I'll have a think. I'm sure I've seen it recently... 'Bye.

CLICK. Roland puts down the phone. But he's already gripped by an idea. He runs his fingers along the shelves. Scanning for a title. He moves to another pile, rapid search --

ROLAND

(from memory)

... The Shadowy Portal... An autobiographical reminiscence... by Mrs. Hella Lees...

Roland darts from shelf to box, repeating his mantra --

ROLAND

... the London Library copy...

Until like a divining rod, his hands guide him to a pile of books behind a box. Roland dives in, brings out --

A book. It's old. With gilded leaves, an embossed dove on the cover. And in the frontispiece -- an oval photograph of Mrs. Lees. Roland leafs through the pages --

ROLAND

The seance... of course, the seance...

He takes the copy, sits down in an armchair. Finds a chapter, headed "A Mummy Possesst?" As he starts to read, a cat jumps up, curls 'round him. Over Roland, reading --

ASH (V.O.)

`I wish to see the lady of the house... Mrs. Lees... Please, allow me in... No one must know... No one...

SMASH CUT TO:

FLASHBACK - INT. MRS. LEES'S HOUSE (CHEYNE WALK, CHELSEA) - NIGHT (1860)

A velvet curtain sweeps open to reveal --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Ash in black, wearing a face-mask. He enters the chamber, lit by a strange, violet ray from a lantern. A masked woman -- MRS. HELLA LEES -- clad in jewels, leads him over towards --

MRS. LEES
Gentlemen, members of the Vestal
Lights, let the seance begin...

A circular table: seven ladies, four men; they clasp hands. Ash takes a seat in the circle.

MRS. LEES
(to spirit world)
We are ready to receive you, if your
spirit stands at the threshold, we
ask you to reveal yourself. Is
anybody there...?

Mrs. Lees taps the table. Ash scans the circle, his eyes hit those of a woman opposite. A sharp intake of breath as --

MRS. LEES
I feel hands. As cold as ice...

The table vibrates. Ash watches Mrs. Lees shake uncontrollably. A spirit voice speaks through her --

MRS. LEES
'Do not force me...'
(as herself)
Who is it?
(as voice)
'Nobodaddy...'

Ash sees a halo of electromagnetic force like fire surround Mrs. Lees. Suddenly Ash feels a TAPPING shake the table. A breeze lifts skirts. Ash hears a WOMAN SOB, then LAUGHTER.

MRS. LEES
There is a hostile presence in the
room. Is there a spirit who wishes
to speak?

The sound of RUNNING WATER. Ash looks at the woman opposite: and recognizes Christabel, who speaks in a trance, a spirit voice possesses her.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHRISTABEL

(in a spirit voice)

`Remember the stones...'

(in her own voice)

Where are you?

(in the spirit

voice)

`I bring gifts...'

MRS. LEES

She is possessed. A spirit is with us...

Ash wants to go over to her. But the circle's hands hold onto him. He hears RUSHING WATER boom LOUDER, then sees --

A vision of a white hand carrying a white wreath, hanging from the chandelier by threads. The circle clasps hands again --

MRS. LEES

Let her go... the spirit has entranced her... Do not wake her...

As Blanche's spirit manifests itself --

MRS. LEES

You bring a message of love...?

But an ELECTROMAGNETIC CURRENT CRACKLES, holds Ash's hands fast. Ash struggles to get free --

ASH

I must speak...

Ash moves towards Christabel. But the wreath tangles him in threads like a web. He tries to break free, but ghostly hands wrap around his throat --

ASH

Away, foul spirit. I beg you --

Ash turns to see a ghostly face of Blanche. In rage, he raises the wreath in his hands. Mrs. Lees pleads --

MRS. LEES

-- Don't break the spell -- her spirit will be harmed forever -- !

But Ash hurls the wreath away, a SHRIEK as Blanche's spirit disappears. Ash rushes at Christabel, who almost faints in her trance. He holds her in his arms, removes her mask --
(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ASH

Speak, I beg you... I came to France... you turned me away, my darling... For God's sake, answer... tell me the truth... I must know...

Weeping, Ash cradles Christabel in his arms.

ASH

Where is she...? Is she not dead? Tell me... Tell me what you have done...

Ash bends to hear Christabel's whisper.

CHRISTABEL

You have made me... a murderess.

Christabel collapses. Guests try to pull Ash away from her. He howls in pain and rage --

ASH

Dead...? No-o-oo -- !!

Ash pushes over a candle flame, which spills over. Mrs. Lees comes to her senses.

HER POV

around Ash a fiery halo of red.

BACK TO SCENE

MRS. LEES

Sir, you are a demon... Go now...

Ash stands up, a force of red light surrounding him. He looks at his own hands, sees them -- smeared in translucent blood.

END OF FLASHBACK.

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. CONVENT OF ST. ANNE (BRITTANY, FRANCE) - LIBRARY
- DAY

In a cavernous library lined with ancient tomes, at a long oak table, Maud finishes work for the day. Around her, nuns put away leather volumes, ready to close up. Maud picks up her notebooks, piles of photocopied documents. Exits into -

EXT. CONVENT OF ST. ANNE (BRITTANY) - LIBRARY - DAY

A cloistered courtyard of a medieval convent. RAIN POURS down. She passes nuns scurrying about their business, sheltered by the old cloister roofs. In her brisk, modern clothes, Maud is a surreal contrast, as she emerges to see -
-

A young, chic French scholar, DR. ARIANE LE MINIER.

EXT. BRITTANY COUNTRYSIDE - DAY

Inside a battered Renault, WINDSCREEN WIPERS SLOOSH BACK AND FORTH, as Le Minier and Maud drive into a small town.

LE MINIER

When I sent my discoveries to Professor Stern, I hoped she would notify you. I am a great admirer of your writings on Christabel.

MAUD

You couldn't have been more helpful, Ariane.

LE MINIER

The photocopier is a great democratic invention, no...?

As Le Minier talks, Maud stares through windscreen wipers, in a blur of rain and glass, she suddenly sees --

HER POV - AT SIDE OF ROAD

Two bedraggled figures, one of them Christabel, distressed and crying, holding out her hands. Maud focusses on her as the CAR ZOOMS past -- Their eyes meet -- as --

LE MINIER (O.S.)

... We should share our information, should we not? Is it not a feminist principle, cooperation?

BACK TO SCENE

Maud snaps back, answers with a smile. Le Minier buzzes along the country roads, heading for the nearby small town.

EXT. HOTEL (LA CAP COZ, BRITTANY) - DAY

Rain pours down. Le Minier sets Maud down nearby her hotel in a provincial seaside town, near a sandy bay and dark sea. As Maud runs to the entrance, she sees someone sheltering from the elements. Hunched over, slumped, drenched by rain --

On closer inspection, she sees -- Roland. Shocked at first, she warms to a smile. As Roland looks up, anorak collar pulled up. And through the rain, they rush together, throw arms 'round each other. Then slowly pull apart --

ROLAND

We must be mad.

MAUD

Of course we are mad.

Roland pauses as if about to say something important. And sneezes.

INT. HOTEL (LE CAP COZ, BRITTANY) - DAY

In her bedroom, Roland sits, feet in a bowl of steaming water. He wraps a towel 'round his head, as he and Maud share their discoveries.

ROLAND

She was there. Christabel was there at the seance. But Ash was so full of rage --

MAUD

Or grief. He believed Christabel was responsible for someone's death. The question is -- 'Who?'

ROLAND

Blanche, of course. You said no one knew where Christabel was when Blanche committed suicide.

MAUD

Until now. That's what I found from Leonora's letter. Christabel had family in Brittany. A young cousin who wrote a journal. A French researcher found fragments of poems by Christabel dated Spring 1860. This is where she was. Until now, nobody knew...

Maud takes the towel, rubs Roland's hair dry.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROLAND

I wish nobody knew where I was.

MAUD

Me too. I've lied shamelessly to Leonora. I even stole Dr. Le Minier's address.

ROLAND

All scholars are a bit crazy.

Roland sneezes, blows his nose. He's in a bad way, his towel like a turban, balanced on his head.

MAUD

Roland, you said Ash came to France. When exactly -- ?

ROLAND

Spring, 1860...

MAUD

Exactly?

ROLAND

Around... March.

MAUD

So think about it, Roland.
(Roland is blank)
How long is that after Ash and Christabel were in Whitby?

Under his turban, Roland does his sums. Maud knows the answer.

ROLAND

About... eight... no... Nine months.

MAUD

Nine months.

Maud stares at Roland. Who gasps with surprise. As he dries his hair, he freezes. A sudden realization --

ROLAND

A... child.

EXT. BRITTANY - INTERCUT VARIOUS SHOTS - DAY/NIGHT

Out walking -- two figures, Christabel with her young cousin, SABINE. Christabel's pale face, unwell, under strain.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

CHRISTABEL

And how do you think things are with me, cousin Sabine?

Christabel turns her face away. Sabine sees she is weeping.

CONVENT

Christabel knocking on the door. Then INSIDE the courtyard. A cloak conceals her figure. INSIDE an office, a nun pulls aside the cloak. Pregnant. Then --

CUT BACK TO:

ROLAND

ROLAND

If there was a baby, did it survive?

MAUD

I don't know.

ROLAND

Though if it survived --

MAUD

Ash could have believed she was trying to speak to her child in the seance.

ROLAND

Her dead child. But if Ash ever knew --

MAUD

In the records of the Convent, they record a visit by a gentleman who answers Ash's description. He was turned away. They never spoke again...

INT. HOTEL (LE CAP COZ, BRITTANY) - DAY

Maud and Roland go downstairs, peering over the bannister. Suddenly, they freeze. In the lobby of the hotel, they see --

Leonora Stern with Blackadder, canoodling fondly.

MAUD

Oh, no...

IN LOBBY

Roland and Maud overhear Leonora with Blackadder.

LEONORA

I don't understand why Maud dashed off without a word. That letter from Le Minier was mine, after all. We were good friends...

(beat)

Perhaps your Roland Michell is some kind of macho boss-man.

BLACKADDER

He's not forceful. It's his major failing.

LEONORA

Then it must be love.

BACK ON STAIRS

Maud and Roland sneak back to their room.

MAUD

Should we go and confront them?

Maud puts out both her hands. Roland takes them.

ROLAND

I think we should. And I think we can't.

INT./EXT. HOTEL (LE CAP COZ, BRITTANY) - DAY

As Leonora and Blackadder, in bright leisurewear and sunglasses, stride out from the hotel. Roland and Maud sneak out of the entrance into -- a taxi CAB.

Which ZOOMS off at high speed, passing them on the esplanade.

EXT. PORT (CAEN, BRITTANY) - EVE

At a cross-channel port, an overnight ferry in dock. Roland and Maud walk up the gangway, into the passenger sections.

INT. FERRY BOAT CABIN - EVE

Inside the tiny cabin, Roland and Maud put down their bags and investigate. A white room. Twin bunks.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Shower. They seem light-headed and giddy. Roland takes stock.

ROLAND

These are clean narrow white beds.
Just like we always wanted.

MAUD

So they are. Do you prefer top or bottom?

ROLAND

I don't see that it matters. And you?

MAUD

I'll take the top.

Suddenly, perfectly aware of the absurdity and sexual ambiguity of it all, they laugh out loud.

EXT. FERRY BOAT - NIGHT

Night time. Outside, the WATER HISSES and PRICKLES. Dark waves carved by the huge boat... as down below --

INT. FERRY BOAT - CABIN - NIGHT

On a low light, Roland and Maud lie together, back to back on the bottom bunk, ankles overlapping. Maud is reflective, muted. Neither can sleep.

MAUD

I feel sad about Christabel's baby...

ROLAND

We don't know it was dead.

MAUD

I can't help thinking... if it wasn't destined to die, why did she run away? Why didn't she stay where she was safe?

ROLAND

Maybe she meant no one to know what happened. Not even us...

Roland turns toward Maud. Who is still turned away.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROLAND

I think I've lost everything I've ever had or cared about. Ash. My job. Even Val now...

MAUD

Oh...?

ROLAND

She walked out. I should feel frightful. But if I had to tell the truth...

(beat)

I want... that life, Maud. Ash and Christabel's. I'm not afraid to admit it.

Roland puts his hand on Maud's, looks directly at her. His face next to hers, a moment of truth.

ROLAND

I know it sounds crazy --

MAUD

I thought you were like me. You wanted the empty room.

ROLAND

I did. Now I'm not so sure.

MAUD

No, please -- I can't -- I don't want to lose myself. Do you understand how important that is?

ROLAND

Yes -- but -- to live life so powerfully. Does anyone do that anymore?

MAUD

Not me -- too romantic. Life isn't like that.

ROLAND

Maybe that's why we read books, you and me.

Silence overtakes them. Comfortable and safe, the swell of the SEA hushes them. The WIND outside CARRIES OVER INTO --

FLASHBACK - INT. ASH'S HOUSE (RUSSELL SQUARE) - LIBRARY
- NIGHT (1859)

At the open window, a lace curtain billows in the breeze. Ellen closes the window. She walks into the library, a FIRE ROARS.

At a desk, Ash looks through a microscope: At a dead butterfly. Its intricate patterns. A pin is poised over the sample. Yet his mind is on something else. He gets up, moves behind her. Ellen stops.

ASH

Ellen, I have something I must tell you.

Ellen turns to him. Ash pauses, then words tumble out.

ASH

For the last year, I have been in love with another woman. I could say it was a sort of madness. A possession, as by demons. A kind of blinding. At first it was only letters -- and then -- in Yorkshire -- I was not alone --

ELLEN

I know.

Ellen looks up at Ash, his proud crest fallen.

ASH

How long?

ELLEN

I was told. I had a visitor.

Ellen unlocks a drawer. Brings out the original copy of Ash's poem, in an envelope addressed to "Miss La Motte, Bethany..."

ELLEN

The original version of your poem. Certain passages are superior, I think, to what you now have here.
(beat)

I sensed a new inspiration. A muse. As I would care to inspire you, were I a poet.

Silence. Ash is speechless, deep in thought.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ASH

If I had not told you about this --
about Miss La Motte -- would you
have restored this to me?

ELLEN

I think not. How could I? But you
have told me.

ASH

Miss Blanche Glover gave you this?

CLOSEUP - ELLEN

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT./INT. ASH'S HOUSE (RUSSELL SQUARE) - DAY (1859)

Up at the window, the lace curtain flutters out on the
breeze.

Inside, in the reception room -- a letter is flung onto a
table.

ELLEN (V.O.)

She wrote twice. And came here...
On the envelope: Ash's handwriting: Inside, a manuscript
of a poem. Addressed to "Christabel La Motte..." Ellen
stares at it.

She turns away from -- Blanche. Who paces up and down in
her neat worn boots, clasping and unclasping her hands.

BLANCHE

Your own happiness is ruined, is a
lie. You could help me if you
chose. We were so happy --

From the table, Ellen picks up a bell. She rings it.

ELLEN

I can do nothing about your
happiness, Miss Glover. Please
leave my house.

A maid comes to the door. Ellen stares at her. Blanche
pauses. Then exits. Ellen turns away.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. ASH'S HOUSE (RUSSELL SQUARE) - LIBRARY - NIGHT (1859)

Ash before Ellen, stumbling to find words.

ASH

I do not know what to say, Ellen. I do not expect to see her -- Miss La Motte again. We were agreed that this one summer must see the end -- of...

(voice trembles)

... the end. And even if that were not so -- she has vanished, she has gone away --

Ellen hears Ash's pain, notes it, says nothing.

ASH

You must be angry -- distressed --

ELLEN

Not angry. I know how gentle and patient you have been with me. For I have never been a real wife to you...

ASH

Ellen, do not --

ELLEN

If I have not proffered the proper intimacy between husband and wife, that is my regret, Randolph.

(beat)

Yet you have never ceased to love me.

A silence falls between them.

ASH

You are my wife, Ellen. I shall always love you.

ELLEN

Then, as you have forgiven me, so I shall forgive you.

Ellen wipes a tear from her eye, looks up at Ash.

ELLEN

It is a question of silence. Let us not talk of it again, Randolph.

Ellen gently responds, touching his hand. NOISES FADE IN from a MODERN-DAY STATION, as we --

DISSOLVE BACK UP TO:

EXT. VICTORIA STATION - DAY (PRESENT)

A busy train station. Roland and Maud emerge on a platform, push through crowds. Roland looks up to see: a wild figure dashing up the platform: Beatrice, waving frantically.

ROLAND

Beatrice -- ?

Beatrice arrives, huffing and puffing, out of breath.

BEATRICE

Oh dear. I am sorry. You may think I'm mad, or bad, or presumptuous -- I could only think of you --

MAUD

Dr. Nest -- Beatrice -- please...

BEATRICE

I wouldn't have come unless you seemed to care about her --

ROLAND

About...

BEATRICE

Her... Ellen.
(beat; as if it was obvious)
I have to tell you both something.
It's urgent.

INT. ASH HOUSE MUSEUM (RUSSELL SQUARE) - NIGHT (SUNSET)

Back indoors, a cup of tea freshly made, Beatrice is back under control. Roland and Maud listen, as Beatrice calms down.

BEATRICE

Mortimer Cropper was here today.
Looking at sections of Ellen's journal.

MAUD

About Blanche's visit?

Beatrice looks at them both. Very serious.

BEATRICE

No. About Ash's funeral. He brought young Hildebrand Ash.
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BEATRICE (CONT'D)

I'm absolutely certain Cropper wants to open up Ash's tomb. He wants to find out what is in the box.

MAUD

What box?

BEATRICE

Ellen's.

ROLAND

The one Ellen buried in Ash's tomb.

Maud sits down with Roland, now surrounded by Beatrice and Maud.

BEATRICE

I don't know what to do. They all dislike me so -- they think Ellen's diary is unimportant. I've been thinking...

(beat)

Ellen wrote to baffle us.

ROLAND

What do you mean?

BEATRICE

She wrote so much. To throw us off the scent.

(beat)

I believe she must have known if there was a child... what happened to it. How it died. That's why she buried the truth in a box...

From a leather portfolio, Beatrice removes an old scrap of paper.

BEATRICE

She left this scrap of paper in her desk when she died. I'm sure Ellen knew the scavengers would come -- sooner or later...

(reciting from memory)

'What shall I be without you?
My Randolph now is gone...'

Beatrice stands in front of the glass cases, from inside, Roland and Maud hear a FLUTTERING sound. As if the BUTTERFLIES are suddenly alive, fluttering wings, trying to escape, as --

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

With Maud, he follows Beatrice towards the old bedroom.

BEATRICE

Follow me...

Beatrice walks into the old bedroom, past the glass cases and portraits, the aquarium and books of the first dreamlike shot --

As if Beatrice has become Ellen's ghost...

CUT TO:

FLASHBACK - INT. ASH'S HOUSE (LONDON) - BEDROOM - NIGHT
(1888)

Ellen leans over her dying husband. Ash lies in bed, propped up on pillows. He is dying.

ASH

Forty-four years with no anger. I do not think many husbands and wives can say as much...

(beat)

It cannot be helped. Do you think, after death, we continue...?

Ellen bows her head, begins to weep.

ASH

Do not cry. I am not sorry. I have not -- done nothing, you know. I have lived.

Ellen sees Ash clutching in his hand a gold pocket watch: a long, plaited chain of gold hair tied around it.

ASH

Do not let me be picked by vultures. Burn what they should not see...

Ellen unwinds her hair from his hands. A KNOCK at the door. As she gets up to go, Ash moans deliriously --

ASH

Summer fields... in a twinkling of an eye, I saw her. I should have looked after her. How could I? I could only hurt her...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ELLEN

You saw who? In the summer fields?
You saw who, Randolph?

ASH

(after a pause)
I... forgot...

Ash falls back asleep, his hand clutches the watch with the golden hair which Ellen will also later bury. Ellen goes to the door, opens it to a doctor. As he enters, Ellen turns back --

To look at her husband -- a moan as she sees he is --

Dead. A wind blows her candle, smoke past tearful eyes.

INT. ASH HOUSE (RUSSELL SQUARE) - LATER THAT NIGHT

ON a ROARING FIRE, flames burn up papers. Ellen watches, throws more on. At her husband's desk --

ELLEN

What shall I be without you?

(NOTE: The one Roland and Maud now read, lies on the desk.) She takes a packet of letters, tied with ribbons. She hesitates.

Instead of throwing them on the fire, Ellen walks toward a box...

ELLEN (V.O.)

`-- My Randolph now is gone.
Tomorrow we will set out together on
his last blind journey...'

She unlocks the box, removes an envelope, addressed to "Randolph Ash." The broken seal recognizable as Christabel's: a crest of arms, a shield held up by a unicorn and centaur.

Ellen goes to the bed-stand: a pocket watch with a plait of golden hair wrapped around the chain-ring.

ELLEN (V.O.)

`... And these letters and mementoes
-- why do I choose to put them up,
in their sealed enclosure...?

On the desk beside Ellen's note, an open box. She hesitates, holding the letters in her hand, then --

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY (1888)

As in the opening -- the same box. Closed and sealed in Ellen's hands. PULL BACK to reveal: mourners in black. Ellen walks forward with the box --

ELLEN (V.O.)

'... I want them to have a sort of duration. A demi-eternity...'

Places the box in the mausoleum near Ash's coffin.

ELLEN (V.O.)

'... And if the seekers dig them out again...?'

On cue, the GATES CLOSE WITH a THUD. The box now locked and sealed in the mausoleum --

ELLEN (V.O.)

'... Then justice will perhaps be done to her when I am not here to see it.'

END OF FLASHBACK.

INT. ASH'S HOUSE MUSEUM - NIGHT

In the shadowy twilight, Beatrice looks out from the darkness. She takes back her precious note from Roland and Maud.

ROLAND

'Justice will perhaps be done to her.' Who did she mean?

BEATRICE

I've asked myself that question all these years. A scholar's lifetime...

MAUD

If Cropper digs it up, he can keep the truth hidden forever.

ROLAND

So what can we do? We'd need to catch him in the act --

BEATRICE

Or get to the box before him --

ROLAND

You mean, break in... to the tomb?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

BEATRICE

I know it sounds... barbaric.

MAUD

This note you've shown us -- no one else has seen it?

BEATRICE

(shaking her head)

No one else has asked. They don't think Ellen is important. But, you see? She is.

Roland looks at Maud, an unaccustomed glint in his eye.

ROLAND

Then we need to go now.

EXT. INN (NEAR CEMETERY) - NIGHT

An 18th Century inn with mossy roof and orchard, near a village church. Beneath a large tree, the dark shape of a Mercedes. Trunk open, with Cropper and Hildebrand inspecting lights, shovels, ropes.

HILDEBRAND

I suppose we could leave false clues. Blame it on the Satanists. A black mass or something...

Hildebrand snorts with laughter. Cropper frowns.

CROPPER

I am not a common thief. It's only that box -- the thought of it decaying in the ground -- the thought of perhaps never knowing --

He closes the trunk. Cropper and Hildebrand walk over to the inn, and enter, VOICES CARRYING OVER inside --

EXT. ROADS TO CEMETERY - NIGHT

On hilly roads, Maud drives her car through thickening mist, Roland at her side. They pass the trip in silence, each waiting for the other to speak.

MAUD

You packed the things?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROLAND

Sure.

MAUD

The crowbar?

ROLAND

Yes. The crowbar.

MAUD

We might need it. Aren't you worried -- ?

Maud glances over towards him, her excitement palpable. Then -- she swerves to avoid a truck; Roland winces, sighs.

ROLAND

I don't worry about anything. Not now. At the moment, I feel all -- clear in the head -- if you know what I mean.

They sit in silence as she zooms down a narrow side street through the fog. Then down a steep hill with trees on both sides.

MAUD

Roland, I'm sorry how it turned out.

ROLAND

For who?

MAUD

You. And me. I think I was afraid.

ROLAND

I don't think so. Not you. Of what?

MAUD

Of falling in love with you.

ROLAND

I didn't know you wanted to... That's over now, anyway. I don't want you to love me.

MAUD

You don't?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROLAND

No. Too complicated. I can't think about 'us' anymore.

The fog grows thicker, as if they're driving back in time --

FLASHBACK - INT. ASH'S HOUSE - DAY (1888)

Illuminated in a flash of lightning: as the beginning -- FOOTSTEPS. A hand KNOCKS on a door. Three knocks.

MAID (O.S.)

Mrs. Ash...?

END OF FLASHBACK.

RETURN TO:

EXT. ROADS NEAR CEMETERY - NIGHT

Roland slams on the brakes. Swirling fog clears to reveal -

A hound like Christabel's companion from Seal Court, in the road. The animal vanishes behind another cloud of fog. Roland and Maud drive slowly forward. The fog grows more misty --

COVERING the SCREEN as we --

RETURN TO:

FLASHBACK - INT. ASH'S HOUSE - DAY (1888)

The same hand KNOCKING on the door. Details become clearer, as we REVEAL. Again the KNOCKING. A hushed servant's voice:

MAID (O.S.)

Mrs. Ash... a letter.

Sound of RAIN ON GLASS. HORSES' HOOVES ON COBBLESTONES. The door opens to reveal Ellen, facing her young MAID.

MAID

A lady called Miss La Motte came to the door. She gave me this letter for your husband. She said it was very important.

Ellen takes an envelope from the girl's hand, closes the door.

CLOSEUP - LETTER

The coat of arms from Seal Court. In Christabel's handwriting: "To Randolph Henry Ash Esq -- Most Urgent." And her name: "From: Christabel La Motte, Seal Court, Lincolnshire."

Ellen takes the letter. Slowly, softly, she walks into the --

BEDROOM

Where Ash lies in bed, deathly ill. As Ellen picks up the letter, she holds it to her, unable to let it go --

Poised over a candle's flame --

EXT. INN (NEAR CEMETERY) - NIGHT (PRESENT)

Peering through the bar window, Roland sees Cropper eating and drinking with Hildebrand and Fergus. He sneaks back to Maud, standing by Cropper's Merc.

ROLAND

They're all there. Cropper, Hildebrand, even Fergus.

MAUD

Roland, did you bring a knife?

ROLAND

Yes. Do you need it?

MAUD

Yes, I do.

Roland brings out a knife from his bag. Without warning, Maud takes it over to the Merc, stabs one tire. Then the other. AIR RUSHES OUT. The TIRES PUNCTURE fast.

MAUD

All right -- shall we?

Roland stares at Maud and the knife. Both is disbelief.

EXT. CEMETERY - NIGHT

Maud and Roland pull up on the hill near the cemetery gates. On the gates, a sign: "STRICTLY NO ADMITTANCE" Nearby a large wall, where they place a ladder.

Up over the wall, into the cemetery they go.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Walking through the graveyard, 'round long curved avenues of the necropolis. As if, from the tombstones and graves, voices fill the air.

CHRISTABEL (V.O.)

'My dear, my dear...'

HOLD ON Roland and Maud as they disappear up the hill, into the gloomy darkness among the trees waving in the breeze.

INT. CEMETERY - NIGHT

Near the mausoleum, the tomb awaits, the box inside.

CHRISTABEL (V.O.)

'... I ask for your forgiveness for intruding on you at this time. I am told you are gravely ill...'

INSIDE CABINET

HOLD ON the letter, its flap of envelope open. We hear a voice, MOVE TOWARDS it, until white paper FILLS the SCREEN.

CHRISTABEL (V.O.)

'... I have writ down some things I dearly wish you should know...'

FLASHBACK - INT. SEAL COURT - DAY (1888)

As in Roland and Maud's earlier journey, we CLIMB UP --

A winding spiral staircase leading to a tower bedroom, walls now freshly-pained, Christabel's dolls -- where Maud and Roland find the letters a century later -- kept neatly on their bed.

A woman sits at her desk, talking softly as she composes a letter. It is Christabel, now an old woman, in her 60s.

CHRISTABEL

'... I sit here like an old witch in a tower. You will say to me, it should have been told, twenty-eight years ago. I know -- I have known for these many years -- that I have done you wrong. Yet, my guilt for all that happened made it impossible...'

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Christabel drifts to the window. Golden summer sun floods in.

CHRISTABEL

`... The truth is, that you have a daughter, who is well, and married, and the mother of a wonderful boy.'

She looks down from her isolation onto the grass knoll below, so well-kept in its day. A beautiful woman in her late 20s, MAIA BAILEY, plays with her baby boy.

CHRISTABEL

`... She is beautiful, and called Maia, and resembles, I think, both her parents, neither of which she knows to be her parents...'

Christabel turns from the window, lost in her memories.

FLASHBACK - EXT. FIELD (BRITTANY) - NIGHT (1860)

Christabel's memories. We are FLYING OVER rugged winter terrain before a farmhouse, TOWARDS a barn in Brittany, decades ago.

CHRISTABEL (V.O.)

`... We agreed to leave each other and never look back. And for pride's sake, and yours, I resolved to keep my side of it. When I discovered my condition, Blanche and I quarrelled bitterly. I could not come to you. So I made arrangements -- I found a place to go in France -- but you came searching after me...'

The doors of the barn open for us, and we CREEP PAST cows and mules that stare TOWARDS us.

CHRISTABEL (V.O.)

`... So I fled, I fled...'

We REACH a haystack in the back, where the squatting Christabel trembles in agony. CIRCLE AROUND, we see her sweat-drenched face.

CHRISTABEL (V.O.)

`... I concluded that no decent refuge remained fit for me...'

She opens her mouth to scream, as --

INT. CHRISTABEL AND BLANCHE'S HOUSE (RICHMOND) - 1859

CHRISTABEL (V.O.)
 `... And when I thought of poor
 Blanche...'

INT. SITTING ROOM

Alone, Blanche sewing pockets of a dress: stones (from Whitby) expertly bound with needle and thread...

ON TABLE

A suicide note in Blanche's writing, placed on a desk: "To whom it may concern..." Weighed down by a stone.

EXT. THAMES RIVER - CHELSEA BRIDGE - 1859

Upon a bridge, Blanche looks into swirling waters of a dark river. In her pockets, silvery-black stones sewn in by thread. As she walks to the precipice of the bridge, and jumps --

CHRISTABEL (V.O.)
 `... I knew I had killed her...'

UNDERWATER

At the bottom of the river, Blanche tumbles, bubbles slowly expiring from her mouth. Her body weighed down by the fossil stones, she floats eerily in the cold darkness...

CHRISTABEL (V.O.)
 `... I could not face the world.
 Nor you...'

EXT. CLIFFS (BRITTANY) - 1860

In a dark cloak, Christabel, alone, facing out to sea. At her lowest ebb. Distraught, tears streaming down her cheeks.

CHRISTABEL (V.O.)
 `... I felt haunted, cursed, and
 alone...'

DISSOLVE THROUGH TO:

INT. SEAL COURT - CHRISTABEL'S ROOM - DAY (1888)

Despite the memory, Christabel's face is calm and peaceful.

CHRISTABEL (V.O.)

`... So I gave dear Maia to my
sister Sophie Bailey, who brought
her up as her own...'

Christabel wanders into the shadows of her room, which are covered with stacks of papers. A lifetime of words.

CHRISTABEL (V.O.)

`... Now I want to make amends, let
these ghosts rest in peace. I have
flown about the battlements of this
stronghold, crying on the wind of my
need to see and feed and comfort my
child, who knows me not and -- to
whom can I say this, but you? -- who
loves me not...'

She returns to the window.

CHRISTABEL (V.O.)

`... And yet, she is so happy. Ah,
but if you were here, you would see
how I dare not disturb her peace...'

CLOSEUP ON YOUNG MAIA'S FACE

She looks up, perhaps her eyes meet Christabel's. But the young mother quickly averts them.

CHRISTABEL (V.O.)

`... I have been angry for so long -
- with all of us, with you, with
Blanche, with my poor self... and
now, near the end, I think of you
with clear love...'

She moves to her desk, signs her name to the letter, then picks up a small art-nouveau picture frame. She removes the photo.

CHRISTABEL (V.O.)

`... I send you her picture. She
will have nothing of her strange
name, and prefers to be called May,
which suits her...'

CLOSEUP ON PHOTO

of a woman on her wedding day. Original of the photo on Maud's mantelpiece, her great-great-grandmother, May.

CHRISTABEL (V.O.)

`... Did we not -- did you not
flame, and I catch fire? Is that
not fine? Shall we survive and rise
from our ashes...?'

ON CHRISTABEL'S FACE

as she prepares to part with her photo. A burst of sunshine surges through the window.

She is consumed in white. As the light slowly fades, we HOLD ON photo, but now it's old, faded, and in muddy hands.

END OF FLASHBACK.

DISSOLVE THROUGH and REVEAL --

EXT. CEMETERY - DAWN

Rain starts. The sun is about to rise. Roland and Maud sit at the graveyard by the mausoleum. On the ground --

MAUD

(reading letter)
`... And so, "in the calm of mind,
all passion spent," I thank God --
if there must be a dragon -- that he
was you.'

The box has been opened, the letter (with crest) sits out of its envelope, photos in their hands, watch with its braided lock of golden hair. Roland holds it against Maud's own hair.

ROLAND

It's her. May. She was...

MAUD

My great-great-grandmother, yes.
May...

ROLAND

Now I know why they left all this --
the clues, the poems, the letters.
They wanted you to know, Maud. They
left them for you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Holding the old crumpled pictures of May, Maud is overcome.

MAUD

She looks like Christabel. You can see it.

ROLAND

She looks like you. She looks like Randolph Henry Ash, too.

MAUD

So I look like Ash?

A hint of lightness. Roland smiles, gently touches her face.

ROLAND

I would never have thought of it. But yes -- here, at the corner of the eyebrow -- the edge of the mouth --

MAUD

Now you see it, you'll always see it --

ROLAND

I'll never be free of it.

MAUD

No. We'll never be free.

Maud smiles too, looks up at Roland, as if for the first time. Roland reaches out to her, holds her close to him.

ROLAND

Maud... I... love you so much...

The ice queen melts. Maud buries her face, tears fall.

ROLAND

I just love you. That's how it is.

Maud raises her arms to him, his hands stroke her wet hair, tracing the curves of her shivering body. As --

MAUD

The worst possible way then.

They pull away for an instant.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ROLAND

Yes, total obsession. The worst...

They move closer. Roland knows her heart is barely triumphing over her fear. Fighting every inch of the way, Maud softly brings her lips to his. A heartbeat away from a...

Long, lingering kiss. Until --

Maud opens her eyes, looks up slowly. And behind Roland, sees -- over the brow of the hill, a familiar figure:

Beatrice. Smiling, white hair streaming in the rain. Roland swivels around, to see --

A gathering crowd of sodden, desperate scholars: Beatrice, Cropper, Hildebrand, Fergus, gloomy; ever Blackadder and Leonora.

INT. INN (NEAR CEMETERY)

RAIN POURS down. In the bar, around a fireplace, a muddy crew of scholars, in pajamas and dressing gowns, drink hot toddies; Blackadder and Leonora hold hands, in love. Beatrice passes around the letters.

BLACKADDER

How strange for Maud to be descended from both Ash and Christabel...

FERGUS

Yes. Your lives' work, all in vain...

CROPPER

No, no. I sensed it all along. The old Cropper instinct. I knew it was something vast...

BEATRICE

I can imagine Ellen. She didn't even read it. Just put it away --

BLACKADDER

For Maud. As it turns out. She preserved it for Maud.

BEATRICE

Poor Ash. He never knew... never knew..

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Looking to Leonora, for once speechless, gazing at a damp letter.

LEONORA

... Wow.

PULL BACK from the discussion -- TO upstairs -- where --

INT. INN (NEAR CEMETERY) - ROOM

THROUGH the windows of the 18th Century inn --

In a white room, with a white four-poster, with white-veiled curtains. Maud and Roland by a white bed.

ROLAND

I'm afraid of it, too. Just like you.

MAUD

What cowards we are, after all.
(beat)
Kiss me.

ROLAND

That's what I was afraid of.

Behind the white veils, Maud finally kisses Roland, softly at first, then with all her repressed passion, as they lie down upon the bed --

DOWN BY BED - BOX

And beside it -- the WATCH. With its plait of golden hair, where we HOLD for a moment. Until, weakly, fitfully, the sweeping second-hand gasps out a few inexplicable TICKS -- enough to let us know --

It is alive.

ASH (V.O.)

There are things that happen and leave no discernible trace, are not spoken of or written of, as though such things have never been. Two people met, on a hot May day, and never mentioned the meeting...

DISSOLVE TO:

FLASHBACK - EXT. MEADOW (SEAL COURT) - DAY (1868)

The same WATCH, TICKING...

In the hands of a man, walking down a country lane on a hot May day of bright sunlight and BUZZING INSECTS. Nearby, a meadow full of flowers, like a Monet: blue cornflowers, scarlet poppies, a carpet of yellow daisies sway in the breeze.

Up a lane, walks a bearded man in a black, wide-brimmed hat. From cool shadows, he stares wistfully out in the distance, at -- the gothic towers of Seal Court. The old man is hot, wipes his brow.

As he catches his breath, a nearby CREAKING sound, to and fro, distracts him. Yet so intense is his stare, he hardly notices a young GIRL (8), swinging on a gate.

GIRL

Hello! Are you lost?

The Girl, in blue dress and white pinafore, hums to herself, making a daisy chain. The man looks down at her: he is Ash.

ASH

Am I -- ? Oh, hello. Yes... I was looking up at yonder house. Do you know it?

GIRL

That house? Of course I do. That's my house.

ASH

(beat)
Is it really?

Suddenly curious, Ash cocks his head towards her, lowers himself on one knee. A gentle matter-of-fact tenderness.

ASH

Well, you are a very fortunate girl.
(holding out his
hand)

My name is Randolph Ash. How do you do? May I know yours?

GIRL (MAY)

My name is May Bailey. I have another name also, but I do not like it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ASH

I think I know your mother. You have a true look of your mother.

MAY

No one else says that. I think I look like my father.

ASH

I think you have a look of your father, too.

Ash puts his arms around her waist, lifts her down to his side. Mays sits, pulling grass, surrounded by a cloud of butterflies.

ASH

You seem very happy.

MAY

Oh, yes. I am, I am.

(beat)

Can you make daisy chains?

ASH

I will make you a crown for a May Queen. But you must give me something in exchange.

MAY

I haven't got anything to give.

ASH

Oh, just a lock of hair. To remember you by.

MAY

Like a fairy story.

ASH

Just so.

Ash hunts in his satchel, takes out a tiny pair of pocket scissors. And very gently cuts a long lock from her golden hair.

MAY

Here. I'll plait it for you, to keep it tidy.

May's fingers set to work, Ash gathers up twigs, ferns, flowers.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ASH

I'll make you a crown, like a
fairy's child. Or like Proserpine.
Do you know any poetry?

MAY

I have an Aunt Christabel who is
always telling me poems. But I
don't like poetry.

ASH

I am sorry you don't like poetry, as
I am a poet.

MAY

Oh, I like you. You make lovely
things and don't fuss.

ASH

If I wrote down a message, would you
be kind enough to deliver it to your
aunt?

MAY

A message? What will it say?

ASH

Simply that you met a poet, who was
looking for his fairy goddess, and
who met you instead, and who sends
her his compliments, and will not
disturb her, and is on his way to
fresh woods and pastures anew.

Ash locks into May's eyes. A moment he will remember with
absolute clarity, but which will fade in her memory over the
years. Tiny beetles crawl about their feet.

They go back to working beneath the sun. A man and a girl,
content to share one moment of their lives. As a breeze
floats through, ruffling the leaves around them --

DISSOLVE TO:

SAME SCENE - MOMENTS LATER

Ash stands by the gate, watching May run through the meadow,
note in hand, daisy crown upon her head. Ash winds her
blonde hair-plait around the chain of his watch.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

May climbs up a hill towards Seal Court, where her brothers ambush her. They rough and tumble, falling down the grassy slope. Her crown falls beneath one brother, is crushed.

Among her things, May picks up her half-embroidered cushion (the one Maud finds a hundred years on) with verses only begun. Ash turns away as --

HIS NOTE

without May even registering --

Flies from her hand, up into the air. Carried by the wind like a leaf, it floats through the fields. Over the grass, connected by diamond-threads of light --

Over the yellow and purple flowers, up into the branches of a tree. When a wind blows, RUSTLING LEAVES, seeming to play music upon them. HOLD ON the tree. SLOW PAN THROUGH TO --

END OF FLASHBACK.

EXT. LONDON LIBRARY (ST. JAMES'S SQUARE) - DAY

That same tree. A hundred years later. Now full circle, growing magically in an elegant square in central London. As the WIND RUSHES through the branches, in an ancient harmony --

About to pluck from its branches to tap upon a library window --

Leaves, floating like birds.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END