

The Witching Hour: A Novel Study Guide

The Witching Hour: A Novel by Anne Rice

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Plot Summary

The *Witching Hour* is an epic novel describing the influence that a spirit called Lasher has over the Mayfair family. The thirteenth witch in the family, Dr. Rowan Mayfair, and her new love, Michael Curry, work with an occult organization called the Talamasca and its representative, Aaron Lightner, to resist Lasher's attempts to be born into flesh. However, Rowan is torn between her scientific curiosity, and her resolve to kill Lasher.

Part One introduces Michael, Rowan, and Aaron and the Mayfair family. Michael grows up in New Orleans but moves to San Francisco after the death of his father. Rowan is the daughter of Deirdre Mayfair, but Rowan is adopted at birth and grows up in San Francisco. Rowan rescues Michael from drowning. After the rescue, Michael has a new ability to see images when he touches things. He also remembers fragments of a vision and a mission. Rowan is intrigued by his power, because she has her own terrifying power to kill by telekinesis. When Michael and Rowan finally connect, they fall in love. Michael goes back to New Orleans. Though Rowan has sworn never to try to find out about her birth mother, she finds that promise worthless when she finds out about Deirdre's death. She follows Michael to New Orleans. Aaron approaches Michael for membership in the Talamasca, and invites him to read the Mayfair history.

Part Two presents the history of the Mayfairs collected by the Talamasca, starting in the mid-1600s and following them to France, Saint Domingue, and finally New Orleans. Michael believes that his mission is to somehow stop the spirit Lasher from achieving its ambition. Rowan attends Deirdre's funeral and is amazed by the enormous family ready to accept her as the new legacy designee. Rowan meets with Deirdre's disagreeable aunt Carlotta, and kills the old woman accidentally in her anger. Rowan reads the Mayfair history and decides to stay in New Orleans and live in the house with Michael, embracing the large Mayfair family.

In Part Three, Michael and Rowan renovate the house and plan to get married. Lasher does not interfere or show himself, except for placing the family emerald necklace around Rowan's neck one night. Rowan, Michael, and Aaron talk about their plans to fight Lasher when the time comes.

In Part Four, Rowan is expecting a baby. She meets with Lasher while Michael is out of town. She wants to lure Lasher into flesh, so that she can kill him. However, Lasher takes her baby, merges with the embryo's cells, and grows them into a man. When Michael arrives, Lasher pushes Michael into the pool, where Michael drowns again and sees a hell where all of the Mayfair witches are waiting to repeat Lasher's rebirth themselves. Michael is rescued, but Rowan and Lasher leave so that Rowan can study Lasher's cells. In the Epilogue, Michael waits at the First Street house, now empty of any supernatural forces, hoping for Rowan to successfully kill Lasher and return to him.



Part One: Come Together, Chapters 1-5

Part One: Come Together, Chapters 1-5 Summary

The *Witching Hour* is a novel about generations of the Mayfair family, of which Rowan is the thirteenth. The family is extremely rich, but steeped in mystery and strange events. When Rowan discovers her history, she must choose whether to help the spirit Lasher or find a way to destroy it.

In Chapter One, Dr. Petrie meets Aaron Lightner, and begins thinking about Deirdre Mayfair, a patient of his from New Orleans from long ago. Aaron encourages Dr. Petrie to share his ghost story, and Dr. Petrie finally agrees. Dr. Petrie's story is an introduction to the setting and the Mayfair family. He talks with Deirdre's nurse and her aunt, Miss Nancy, about Deirdre's tragic condition. Miss Nancy warns Dr. Petrie about strange things at that house. Dr. Petrie discovers two of his syringes for Deirdre's medication broken. He realizes that a mysterious vanishing man is behind it when he begins to see the specter near Deirdre. When he mentions the man to Miss Carl, he is alarmed at her indifference. When he tells the head psychiatrist, Dr. Petrie is pulled off the case.

Chapter Two introduces Michael Curry and gives his life story. After drowning at Ocean Beach in San Francisco, and being revived by a skipper on private boat, Michael cannot remember the purpose for which he was sent back from death. He also has a new power to see images from objects or people he touches.

In Chapter Three, Father Mattingly debates with himself about whether to call on the Mayfairs during his visit to New Orleans. His visit is penance to himself for not helping Deirdre when she came to him in the confessional when she was six years old. He is amazed at the story that the catatonic Deirdre could have flown into a rage just two days before, breaking windows and scaring off the men who were trying to commit her to an asylum. Father Mattingly only walks by the Mayfair's house, where he sees Deirdre sitting on the porch, catatonic as always. He also sees a young man kiss her cheek, and Father Mattingly is happy to know that someone still loves the little girl he had failed to help.

Chapter Four introduces Rowan Mayfair, Deirdre's daughter in California who has become a neurosurgeon. Rowan's long shift at the hospital ends. As she strolls through the hospital, not wanting to go to the empty home of her dead adoptive parents, Ellie and Graham, she reminisces about her life. She wants to talk to Michael Curry, the man she rescued from drowning. When Michael's doctor calls, she agrees to Michael's request to go back to her boat.

In Chapter Five Rita Mae Lonigan, Deirdre's friend from boarding school, presents more of the family history. Rita sees Deirdre with the romantic man in the boarding school garden before Deirdre gets expelled. When Deirdre is pregnant, Rita goes to see her. Deirdre begs Rita to call the Talamasca for her. Rita and Deirdre's Aunt Carl fight over



the card until the numbers are illegible. Later, Rita listens to her husband and her father-in-law, the undertakers, talk about the Mayfair family history. Rita goes to Nancy's funeral, where she meets Aaron Lightner. After the funeral, her husband, Jerry Lonigan says that Deirdre is cursed, that the house and the jewels are part of the curse, and that Deirdre's baby is better off getting away from the curse. He tells her what he knows about the legacy. Rita meets with Aaron and tells him everything she knows about the Mayfairs. She agrees to contact him if anything changes with Rita. She calls him a year later when she hears that Deirdre is dying.

Part One: Come Together, Chapters 1-5 Analysis

Dr. Petrie does not want to share his story, but the memory is a burden. He has always wished that he could have helped Deirdre. After seeing Lasher, he is terrified. Later, he realizes that the specter was protecting Deirdre, hoping to stop her medication. When Dr. Petrie shares his story with Aaron Lightner, the one person who might understand the strange story, he is surprised to discover that even though he does not use names, Aaron knows the Mayfairs and their story. He realizes that he has breached patient confidentiality, but after the burden is lifted, he is glad he shared the story. Aaron gives him an update on the family. Deirdre's condition has not changed, but Miss Millie and Miss Nancy have died. Deirdre's lost daughter has become a neurosurgeon in California.

Chapter Two focuses on Michael's current mental state, as well as presenting his life story. Michael's psychometric power drives him crazy until he retreats to the house he restored on Liberty Street, doing nothing but watching his favorite old movies, trying to read his favorite books, and drinking beer. He feels that he should return to the home of his youth, New Orleans. However, he wants to speak to the skipper who rescued him. He is desperate to remember what happened while he was dead. This chapter introduces Michael's purpose for returning from death, which involves a doorway and the number 13.

In Chapter Three, Father Mattingly walks slowly to the Mayfair house, not really wanting to get there. As he walks, he remembers all of the stories of the family he has heard over the years. One story comes from Sister Bridget Marie. She claims that the school girls, led by Deirdre Mayfair, have stolen the flowers from the altar and have scattered them in the school yard, claiming it is the devil's work. In the memory, as Father Mattingly and Sister Bridget Marie talk, more of the Mayfair history takes shape, introducing more of the clan and their mysterious and powerful ways. Father Mattingly also remembers the long-ago confession that he realizes is young Deirdre, who says she is failing at fighting the devil. Father Mattingly wants Deirdre's permission to speak to her aunts about the problem, but he realizes after Deirdre runs out of the confessional that he has said the wrong thing.

As Deirdre gets expelled from one school after another, he feels that he failed her by making the wrong choice. His Grandma Lucy O'Hara knows about the family back to Mary Beth Mayfair. She tells him that the family has murdered many times and gotten



away with it. Father Mattingly also listens as the undertaker, Red Lonigan, and Dave Collins, who has grown up in the same times as Stella Mayfair, talk about the connection between the house, the heirloom jewels, and a purse that never runs out of coins. Father Mattingly remembers the tragic tale of Deirdre's fate, of giving up her baby, and of the awful mental health treatments that left her in her current condition. At Nancy's funeral, Father Mattingly meets Aaron Lightner, who tells Father Mattingly more about the family's deep past at a coffee and sugar plantation in Haiti, before they moved to a plantation called Riverbend near New Orleans. Father Mattingly tells Aaron the bothersome story about the flowers, and he thinks that Aaron understands more than is said, implying that the Englishman can read minds.

Chapter Four provides the character background for Rowan Mayfair. The other doctors' opinions of her foreshadow the knowledge that she is a witch. Rowan remembers her rescue of Michael Curry. She wants Michael to use his new power with the images in his hands to help her understand her own power. She knows that she has killed three times with telekinesis. This strange power also makes her a terrific trauma surgeon, giving her a diagnostic sense of whether she can save a person or not. Rowan feels that Michael is the one person who might understand her. She is attracted to him, even though she does not know him yet. After Ellie's death, Rowan meets Aaron Lightner and wants to learn more about her family history. However, she has signed papers (though of questionable legal validity) and promised Ellie never to go to New Orleans or try to find out about her family.

In Chapter Five, Rita Mae Lonigan is sad that she was not able to help Deirdre keep her baby. The Lonigan undertakers talk of the Mayfair history and imply that the family is involved in things like murder and incest. Rita goes to Nancy's funeral for Deirdre's sake, even though there is no evidence Deirdre understands or cares. Rita makes the connection between the illegible card Deirdre had given her years ago and the man she meets at the funeral. She hopes that by sharing her story with him, he can make sure Deirdre's daughter knows what a sweet girl her mother had been before the shock treatments, and that she had been loved.



Part One: Come Together, Chapters 6-8

Part One: Come Together, Chapters 6-8 Summary

Rowan Mayfair arrives at Michael's house to take him to her boat. Aaron Lightner watches them leave. As Rowan drives Michael to her house, they talk. She realizes that he has not received the letter she wrote him. She tells him what she remembers from his rescue. Michael touches her hand and sees a flash of Graham dying on the kitchen floor after an argument. Rowan tells Michael that she wants him to use his power for her. Michael goes out to the boat, but he learns nothing. Rowan makes suggestions about his purpose he has not considered. She starts to cry, which leads to lovemaking. Rowan tells Michael her story, about her loneliness and her psychic powers. Michael tells Rowan about his story and his visions. As Michael leaves for New Orleans, they exchange numbers.

In Chapter Seven, Michael rides in a cab through New Orleans. He has the cab driver drive by the house in the Garden District, where he notices a keyhole shape in the doorway. He briefly sees "the man." Aaron is there and says he wants to help Michael. Michael agrees to let Aaron take him to the hotel.

In Chapter Eight, Rowan thinks about the encounter with Michael before going into the hospital to lose herself in her work. She wakes that night sure someone is in the house. She sees a man standing on the deck. He puts his hand to the window before slowly disappearing. Rowan feels warmth on the glass, but not the warmth of a human touch. She tries to get in touch with Michael, but the hotel is unable to reach him.

Part One: Come Together, Chapters 6-8 Analysis

As Michael gets ready to leave his Liberty Street house, he has a premonition that he will not return. However, he feels happy to finally be taking action. Rowan thinks she recognizes the Englishman watching them, and Michael thinks he knows who he is. The reader recognizes that it is Aaron Lightner, and that he has his Talamasca motivation for following both of them. Rowan is concerned that random images from her might be the only truth behind Michael's obsession over his visions. When she tells him she heard an L sound when he first breathed during the rescue, he senses the visions pressing in closer. Michael understands quite a bit about Rowan by touching her. He thinks she is trying to warn him about her. Michael is disappointed to learn nothing about his supposed mission while on the boat, but he plans to go to New Orleans that night as his next step. Rowan suggests that Michael was supposed to forget the mission. She even suggests that the beings in the vision caused the accident in the first place. Michael maintains that they are good beings and feels driven to complete his purpose—if he could just remember what it is.



Rowan and Michael are both attracted to each other in fantasy before this meeting. Rowan outwardly encourages Michael, igniting their romance. After their first lovemaking, Michael senses the beings in the vision again, as if they are celebrating. As Rowan tells Michael about herself, she discusses the lure and repulsion of the research work she turned down, compelling herself to save lives in emergency surgery instead of creating amazing cures with tissues from aborted fetuses. She somehow knows about the abortion of Michael's previous girlfriend, which shocks Michael. She tells Michael about her talent as a neurosurgeon, that she believes it is based on a psychic power. She feels guilty, because she believes she intended to kill Graham, and she is afraid of doing it again.

Michael feels protective of Rowan. He tells her about his life and that he feels he has been waiting for something. He feels that he has a purpose. He talks about the house he remembers from his childhood. He knows he needs to go there. As he leaves, he thinks about Rowan's simple questions that have fractured his belief in a grand pattern and purpose. Michael realizes he forgot to use contraception when he made love to Rowan. He notices the Englishman at the airport, boarding the same plane.

In Chapter Seven, Michael is happy to be back in New Orleans at twilight. He knows he loves Rowan, because he cannot stand to be this happy without her. He feels the beings from the visions very close, and he realizes that his purpose is not a literal doorway. Michael calls his purpose a dark mandate, which foreshadows a time when he fully discovers what the purpose is. Michael wants to jump the gate so that he can go up to the house and touch it. The cab driver stops him, and as he sways with drunkenness, the Englishman from the plane catches him and offers to take him to the hotel. Michael asks if Aaron sees the man and has a memory of the game he played with his mother as a child.

In Chapter Eight, Rowan assesses her weakness for falling into Michael's arms, but lets the "mistake" go. She thinks about how he is perfect for her - he appeals to her spiritually and intellectually, as well as physically, when she had previously chosen lovers only for their physical appeal. Rowan feels that she has abandoned Michael. She wants to take care of him. She realizes that she forgot to use contraception for their lovemaking. She does not want to have children, but she also senses something about herself changing. The "ghost" frightens her, and she feels an urgent need to get in touch with Michael. She thinks about the colleague who needs a job, and could fill in at the trauma unit for her, and she starts considering that her promise to Ellie about not going to New Orleans does not really mean anything anymore.



Part One: Come Together, Chapters 9-12

Part One: Come Together, Chapters 9-12 Summary

When Michael wakes in his hotel room, he struggles to remember the previous evening. Aaron is in the parlor of the hotel room. Aaron convinces Michael to go to the Talamasca Motherhouse to read the thick file on the Mayfair witches. Michael leaves word for Rowan that he will call her soon. He promises Aaron he will wait to talk to Rowan until he reads the information about her family history.

In Chapter Ten, Carlotta Mayfair calls Rowan's house looking for Ellie. When she finds out Ellie is dead, she tells Rowan that her mother has died. Rowan insists on postponing the funeral until she arrives. Rowan calls the funeral parlor and asks Jerry Lonigan not to bury her mother until after she arrives. Rowan gives Rita permission to inform the cousins. Rowan grieves for her lost biological mother, finally revealed to her and dead in the same breath. She realizes that she saw the ghost at the exact same time her mother died. Rowan makes arrangements at the hospital to go on leave.

Chapter Eleven takes place at the Talamasca Motherhouse outside New Orleans. As Michael and Aaron eat breakfast, Aaron tells Michael about his previous meeting with Rowan. Michael prepares to read the file on the Mayfair witches, when Aaron returns to the room to tell him that Deirdre Mayfair has died, and that Rowan is coming to New Orleans.

In Chapter Twelve, Rowan arranges her flight to New Orleans, packs, and calls the hotel. She leaves a message for Michael. She secures the house, thinking about sinking the Sweet Christine, since the boat seems to have served her purpose.

Part One: Come Together, Chapters 9-12 Analysis

Aaron is interested in Michael because of the power in Michael's hands. He approaches him because he wants to offer him membership with the Talamasca. Michael's connection with Rowan Mayfair confuses him. He thinks that Rowan has sent Michael to New Orleans to do secretive research about her family. As they sort out the misunderstanding, Michael realizes that the First Street house belongs to Rowan's family. He makes Aaron understand how Rowan and the house are connected with the visions and his purpose. Michael tells Aaron how he is involved with Rowan, how his visions seem connected with the house, and that he has seen the mysterious man many times as he has grown up. When Aaron asks for more details about the visions, he realizes that Michael is already more involved with the Mayfair witches than he thought, and he changes his strategy, planning to break the rules to have a non-experienced member of the Talamasca give the collected material on the Mayfair family to Rowan. Aaron uses the history of the Talamasca order to entice Michael to go to the Talamasca Motherhouse outside of New Orleans to read the information the Talamasca



has collected regarding the Mayfair witches. Aaron warns Michael about the spirit man Michael has seen. Aaron knows "the man" can kill.

Michael feels the visions and purpose becoming clearer as he talks about it. He still cannot remember the actual purpose, however. He understands that he has always known "the man" was not a living human. He thinks that the power in his hands is a distraction, but as he talks with Aaron, he begins to wonder whether it is also connected somehow. He is drawn to the Talamasca. Except for his new love affair with Rowan, it would be a very tempting life to him.

In Chapter Ten, Rowan has a very unpleasant phone call with her Aunt Carl. Not only does Carl have the bad news of Deirdre's death to deliver, but she is insulted that no one informed her of Ellie and Graham's deaths. Carl has planned to tell Ellie the news of Deirdre's death, and let her decide how to handle whether to tell Rowan or not. Carl is rushing the process of getting Deirdre buried, and she really does not want Rowan to come. Because of Michael, Rowan has already been considering ignoring Ellie's request that Rowan not go to New Orleans. Now with the possibility of knowing her very large family, she does not think Ellie really cares anymore after all. Rowan is tired of being lonely. Rowan is impressed by the kindness and friendliness of Jerry Lonigan at the funeral home. She is surprised that they know who she is. She has thought her adoption was a secret, and now she realizes that everyone seems to know about her. She feels resentful at Ellie and Graham from keeping her from knowing the family.

In Chapter Eleven, Michael explains to Aaron that his romance with Rowan feels like rebellion against the beings in his visions. This idea ties into the themes of purpose and destiny in an ironic way, since Rowan is his purpose. Aaron compares the Talamasca to the Catholic church, without the religious dogma. Michael extends this simile when he compares Aaron having Michael intervene with Rowan to asking an unordained priest to perform an exorcism.

Aaron's impression of Rowan is that she wants to talk with him about her powers. He also thinks she is extremely powerful and dangerous.

In Chapter Twelve, Rowan feels surprised at the sympathy from the clerk at the hotel, since she did not tell the woman her mother's name. Rowan feels like she is done with the Sweet Christine. She is amazed that she did not take Michael into the cabin for their lovemaking as she has with her other lovers. It sets Michael apart, and makes him special. Rowan does not care about the paper she signed agreeing to never go to New Orleans. It does not matter enough to her to even destroy the document.



Part Two: The Mayfair Witches, Chapters 13-16

Part Two: The Mayfair Witches, Chapters 13-16 Summary

The Mayfair Witches file that Michael reads begins with a translator's note that Aaron wrote in 1954, helping to place the information in history as well as introduce some of the characters. Petyr Van Abel, a member of the Talamasca during the 1600s, writes a letter to his superior in the order, Stefan Franck, explaining the fate of Deborah Mayfair. Petyr rescues Deborah from Scotland after her mother Suzanne is burned as a witch. Petyr brings Deborah to Amsterdam, hoping she will find refuge in the Talamasca. However, Deborah rejects the Talamasca as an order of witches. She uses her power over the spirit Lasher for personal gain. She marries an old painter and becomes rich, obtaining an incredible Brazilian emerald and gold necklace. When the painter dies, Deborah marries a foreigner and becomes the Comtesse de Montclevé in France. Before she leaves Amsterdam for France, she seduces Petyr as thanks for saving her from Scotland and her sure fate of being burned like her mother. Petyr finds Deborah again many years later, in prison and scheduled for execution as a witch for killing her husband. Deborah warns Petyr to seek shelter during her execution. She asks him to write to her daughter Charlotte, who has escaped to Saint-Domingue, and warn her about the spirit's power and misguided intentions. Michael finishes reading the first file and feels sure that Deborah, her emerald necklace, and Lasher are all part of his vision.

In Chapter 14, Petyr's next letter describes the day of Deborah's execution. Instead of dying on the pyre, Deborah calls Lasher to bring a storm that kills her accusers and several other spectators. Deborah goes to the roof of the church, followed by the Inquisitor. Petyr follows. After Petyr sees Deborah jump to her death, he pushes the Inquisitor off the roof. Stefan from the Talamasca writes back to Petyr forbidding Petyr from going to see Charlotte personally. Petyr's next letter informs the Talamasca that he is already on his way to Saint-Domingue, with or without the Talamasca's blessing. He describes the information he has gathered already about Charlotte, including his suspicion that Charlotte is Petyr's daughter.

Chapter 15 includes two letters Petyr writes from Port-au-Prince in Saint-Domingue. Charlotte is a well-respected woman, known to be the true ruler of the May Faire plantation. No one on the island knows about her past and her mother's fate. Petyr obtains an invitation to her plantation. He tells Charlotte that her mother did not die on the flames. Petyr joins Charlotte's family and guests for dinner, where her invalid father-in-law is brought to the table and seems to talk and lift his arms, which surprises everyone. Charlotte presses Petyr to drink more wine after everyone else has left or retired for the night. She listens to his warnings about Lasher, but claims to have more power over the spirit than her mother. Charlotte takes Petyr to a small building on the



cliffs, where two mulatto maids undress Petyr and begin to seduce him. They blindfold him. He takes off the blindfold to discover he has had sex with Charlotte and not one of the maids. Charlotte keeps Petyr imprisoned in the building for several days, during which they talk about the spirit and Charlotte continues to seduce him. When Charlotte is sure that she has conceived, she wants him to stay, but allows him to leave.

Chapter 16 consists of two short letters from Petyr as well as the Talamasca's summary of his death. Lasher pesters Petyr all the way from May Faire to Port-au-Prince, including opening up the graveyard and animating the corpses to frighten Petyr. In Port-au-Prince, Petyr arranges for his letters to be sent to the Talamasca, and finishes writing his story before returning to May Faire to beg Charlotte to make Lasher stop tormenting him. The assumption of his death is that he is driven into a large crypt at the cemetery, where he becomes trapped.

Part Two: The Mayfair Witches, Chapters 13-16

Analysis

Chapter 13 provides more detail on the history of Deborah and the emergence of Lasher. The chapter mostly consists of an old letter from Petyr van Abel to the Talamasca. Petyr generally wants to help the witches he tries to rescue. Peter sees Lasher at the big circle of stones as he takes Deborah away from Scotland. He wants to save Deborah, but he and the other Talamasca members use the wrong strategy. Petyr realizes that Suzanne thought she was evil and a witch. Deborah suffers from some of her mother's superstitions. However, Deborah is grateful to get away from the poor country town in Scotland to Amsterdam, which she considers a city of wonders, where witches are not persecuted. Lasher grows strong under her guidance. The spirit causes Deborah's husband's accident, because Lasher wants to save her from the pain of discovering that he is not faithful. Because Deborah is rich, and everyone appreciates her skill in healing, no one accuses her until her husband is on his deathbed. Deborah and Petyr talk about the spirit the night before her scheduled execution.

Michael is sure that Deborah is the woman who appeared to him in his vision. He is sure the emerald necklace was part of it. He also knows that Lasher must be the word he spoke when he was first revived after his accident.

In Chapter 14, Deborah claims her innocence, but then proves that she is a far more powerful witch than anyone suspects by invoking the storm. Petyr's murder of the Inquisitor is a passionate act against the forces that condemn witches everywhere. He does not regret it, but the guilt does taint him. Petyr knows, having seen the work of Lasher, and having listened to Deborah's comments about the spirit, that he must intervene with Charlotte, before it brings her to ruin as well as her mother and grandmother. Petyr fears that future witches who try to control the spirit will also lose control of it to their detriment as well, which foreshadows the remaining history of the Mayfair witches.



Petyr compares the witches and their spirits to the pagan gods. However, what bothers Petyr the most about this spirit is the conviction that it is changing and learning, and that he may even have a soul. He hopes to help Charlotte dissolve the spirit somehow. Stefan urges Petyr to come home. He warns that Charlotte and her spirit are too dangerous, and that Petyr is becoming part of their evil (as evidenced by his murder of the Inquisitor). The Talamasca members predict disaster, foreshadowing Petyr's fate, as well as the disaster that seems to follow the Mayfair witches throughout their history. In Petyr's next letter, he denies that he has become a part of the daimon's evil. He states that he acted only out of love of Deborah, and for the poor convicted witches he has watched die on the flames. Petyr learns about Charlotte, her crippled husband Antoine, and their infant son, who came to Montclevé to seek treatment from Deborah for Antoine's illness, which will prevent him from fathering any more children. No one yet knows the story of Deborah's storm on Montclevé, and no one knows the true location where Charlotte is headed.

In Chapter 15, Charlotte wants to have more children. Since her crippled husband can no longer father children, she plans to use Petyr to father her child, even though she knows Petyr is really her father. She gets him drunk and tricks him with the mulatto women, teasing him for being so much like a celibate priest. Once the incest barrier is broken between them, she keeps seducing him until she is sure she is pregnant. Charlotte does not believe in Lasher until he comes to her with secret caresses. Then Charlotte defends the spirit to Petyr's warnings. Charlotte is sure she will be able to control Lasher more than her mother. She calls Suzanne a simpleton, and she knows her mother Deborah had something broken inside her. However, Charlotte thinks of herself as an educated aristocrat, not doomed to the same fate as her mother and grandmother. She is convinced that Lasher serves her will. She does hint that her control over Lasher is limited, when she cries when releasing Petyr. She knows that Lasher plans to hurt Petyr and begs him not to tell her secrets to the Talamasca.

At first, Petyr is convinced that the Mayfair tragedies will come to an end with Charlotte. When he meets Charlotte, he finds her very unwilling to consider his ideas concerning the spirit. He wants her to realize that as she consorts with the spirit, she makes it stronger. He fears what she might teach it. Once Petyr has gotten over the incest taboo because of the trick Charlotte played, he finds himself falling in love with her. He can never openly acknowledge his feelings, though. He is tempted by Charlotte's offer to stay at the plantation with her, but he is driven by his loyalty to the Talamasca to give them information about Lasher's growing powers. Petyr is horrified that Lasher has gone into the body of Charlotte's father-in-law like a puppet master.

Lasher comes to Petyr during his imprisonment, and foretells that he will be enjoying life's pleasures long after Petyr is dead. Petyr tells Charlotte that Lasher does what he wishes, despite what Charlotte thinks. Charlotte makes a voodoo doll from Petyr's hair, fingernail clippings, and blood, and Petyr knows then that he is doomed to die. He compares himself to Shakespeare's King Lear.

In Chapter 16, Lasher uses the secret fears he draws from Petyr's mind to torment him. The spirit may have promised not to kill Petyr, but he can still drive him to madness and

accident. Petyr wants to make sure that the Talamasca receives his account of the spirit. He does not get on the ship to leave for Amsterdam, because he fears that Lasher will sink the ship, killing the other passengers, as well as losing his record of the remarkable supernatural being.



Part Two: The Mayfair Witches, Chapters 17-21

Part Two: The Mayfair Witches, Chapters 17-21 Summary

Chapter 17 is a narrative abstract of the materials collected on the Mayfairs between 1689 and 1900, which Aaron compiles when he becomes involved in studying the Mayfair family with the Talamasca. This narrative provides extensive characterization for the generations of Mayfairs that continue throughout the years. The Mayfairs in Saint-Domingue were powerful, with more rumors of supernatural accidents and wealth, as well as incestuous relationships producing the next heir of the legacy. Marie Claudette Mayfair escaped from the island with all of her family and most of their possessions several days before the slave uprising. She purchased the plantation at Riverbend, where most of the extended family lived until Katherine Mayfair married Darcy Monahan, and they built the house at First Street. Michael stops reading for the night. He and Aaron discuss the possibility that Deborah wants Michael to oppose Lasher.

In Chapter 18, Rowan prepares her replacement, Slattery, to take over for her at the hospital. Before she can leave, she must do an emergency surgery on one of her patients. Slattery drives Rowan to the airport and she offers to sell him her car. She tells him that she thinks she may not come back.

Chapter 19 is Aaron's narrative abstract of the Talamasca's collection on the Mayfairs between 1900 and 1929. The chapter includes ethnic and physical characteristics of the family members from this time period to the present, as well as details and several anecdotes characterizing Mary Beth and Stella. The narrative demonstrates an increase in public sightings or discussions of "the man." Cortland takes unmarried Stella, Stella's baby Antha, and Stella's brother Lionel (who might be Antha's father) on a tour of Europe, during which the baby's nurse has a suspicious accident and dies. Stella addresses a photo discard to the Talamasca, instigating an effort within the Talamasca to lift the ban on contact with the Mayfair witches. Carlotta tries to get custody of Antha.

In Chapter 20, Stuart Townsend, a Talamasca member who is not prepared for dealing with powerful witches, petitions the Talamasca to let him contact Stella Mayfair to give her the family and psychic history that the organization has collected for over 200 years. When he disappears, Arthur Langtry, another Talamasca member, attempts to find him. He contacts Stella, who invites him to a party. At the party, she agrees to go away with him to the Talamasca to learn about her powers and her family, but before she leaves, her brother Lionel shoots and kills her. Arthur sees the ghost of Stuart Townsend and writes to the Talamasca about it, before he dies on the way back to England.

In Chapter 21, Rowan has a dreamlike, but real erotic experience on the plane to New Orleans.



Part Two: The Mayfair Witches, Chapters 17-21 Analysis

Chapter 17 provides a great deal of detail about the generations of witches, as provided by any method (except direct contact) that the Talamasca can employ, especially well-paid observers. They learned to be careful when one of these observers at the May Faire plantation dies a violent death. In the Eighteenth Century, the Mayfairs are a successful family. One female in each generation is regarded as a sorceress, though this label by the slaves does not cause suspicion with their peers. This chapter describes the legacy, which is the way most of the family fortune is passed to one member in each generation, although the other family members are also rich. The early-nineteenth-century witches seem weaker, except for Julien, and the slaves genuinely dislike Marguerite, who seems to be doing experiments on the babies of the slaves. Julien's lover Richard Llewellyn gives the Talamasca an intimate look at life at the house on First Street during Julien's later life. He states that there was a strange presence in the house, in addition to the powers that Julien obviously had. Michael and Aaron discuss the fact that Lasher needs the Mayfair witches. The spirit is not very powerful on his own.

In Chapter 18, Rowan is tired from the long emergency surgery, and this makes her more sensitive to the subtle psychic information she receives from Slattery. He does not like her because he envies her. He wants her job and would be quite happy for her to not return. Rowan does not like the telepathic power, aside from the unpleasant information it reveals.

In Chapter 19, Mary Beth is a powerful witch who uses her powers to build a financial empire, as well as knit her large family into a cohesive unit. This chapter also presents Katherine as a despondent, crazy old woman, forced to move to First Street when the river takes the Riverbend plantation house. The narrative confirms that Stella cannot be Mary Beth's husband's daughter, because of her blood type. Aaron speculates that either Julien or Cortland could be Stella's father, but seems convinced it is Cortland. The continuation of incestuous relationships builds on the theme of a purpose or destiny, as the witches intend to strengthen their psychic powers with inbreeding, with the unfortunate consequence that some of the children turn out like Belle. The narrative continues with a detailed characterization of Stella. Mary Beth's doctor describes the scene of her death to one of the Talamasca's investigators, in which he seems to see an old group of people standing around her. There is a great deal of animosity between Carlotta and Stella, perhaps because Stella becomes the recipient of the legacy, even though she is youngest. There is also animosity between Carlotta and Cortland. Cortland is in charge of the legacy, and refuses to follow Carlotta's orders.

Chapter 20 presents the circumstances of Stella's violent death. It also helps to characterize Carlotta, who becomes an ever-increasing force in the lives of the Mayfairs. Arthur Langtry wins Stella's confidence, but Lionel kills her before anything can come of it. Before Arthur leaves the house, he sees the ghost of Stuart Townsend in

such a manner to convince Arthur that Stuart is dead and his body is in the First Street house.

In Chapter 21, Rowan has an erotic experience with an invisible lover. With Deirdre gone, Lasher needs a new medium. He approaches Rowan intimately, but in a sleepy, dream-like state, without attempting to converse with her. She feels almost violated afterward, but later, she only remembers the pleasure. Rowan misses Michael and is looking forward to, and at the same time, dreading, going to the funeral parlor to see her dead mother.



Part Two: The Mayfair Witches, Chapters 22-23

Part Two: The Mayfair Witches, Chapters 22-23 Summary

Aaron's narrative of the twentieth century Mayfair witches continues in Chapter 22. Lionel raves about the family while restrained in a mental institution, and ends up suffocating in his straitjacket and padded cell. The Talamasca decides to stay away from the Mayfairs until a suitably qualified person can dedicate himself to the case. Aaron introduces his own history, as the member of the Talamasca who takes over the file on the Mayfair witches. The narrative continues with the life of Antha, who runs away as a teenager. She remains hidden in Greenwich Village long enough to sell some of her writing and fall in love with Sean Lacy. When Antha gets pregnant, Sean dies in a car accident. Antha returns to First Street. Antha begs Amanda Grady Mayfair, Cortland's ex-wife, to save her stories and things so that Carlotta will not destroy them. Carlotta tries to get Antha to have an abortion and keeps the family away from her. However, when Deirdre is born, Antha is thrilled to see the family members who crash the house. When Deirdre is only two months old, Antha dies from a fall out the attic window. Another nosy victim dies when Cornell Mayfair, in training to be a psychiatrist, suffers an apparent accidental drug overdose after asking questions about Antha's assumed congenital insanity. Deirdre grows up in the deteriorating house with her aunts. Deirdre gets expelled from school and begs for shock treatments at the mental institution. After running away, Deirdre finally goes to live with Cortland in Metarie.

Chapter 22 presents a revised story of Deirdre, after Aaron gets personally involved in the case. He interviews Beatrice Mayfair, who tells him that Carlotta killed one of the investigators and the rumor that there is a dead body in the attic of the First Street house. Deirdre leaves to attend college at Texas Women's University. Aaron approaches her, offering knowledge of her family's past and help understanding and controlling her powers. Deirdre refuses the information, wanting to forget that part of her life. While Aaron and Deirdre are talking, Lasher appears, scaring Aaron. Deirdre becomes hysterical and runs away. Aaron leaves, but ignores the Talamasca's advice and returns to New Orleans. Aaron experiences several near accidents before meeting with Cortland at the hotel bar. Cortland slips a drug into Aaron's drink, but Aaron refuses to drink it. Cortland tells Aaron to stop bothering Deirdre. Aaron explains how the Talamasca is involved with the Mayfairs, going back to Petyr van Abel. He tells Cortland that no matter what the rest of the family wants, he knows the Talamasca can help Deirdre, who he knows is on the edge of a nervous breakdown. Cortland agrees to read the file and talk again. However, Cortland arranges to kick Aaron out of his hotel. Aaron chooses a different method of travel, but is still poisoned on the trip back to London. He survives.



Aaron continues the narrative of Deirdre's life collected from investigators. She becomes pregnant and begins deteriorating in the spring semester. As Deirdre returns to First Street, the doctor tells everyone that she is marrying the baby's father as soon as possible, but that he is a married college professor. Deirdre remains drugged, and the gossip indicates that her husband-to-be is killed in a car accident. Carlotta arranges a family adoption of the baby. When Cortland tries to intervene and help Deirdre, Lasher pushes him down the stairs. Deirdre's friend from boarding school, Rita Mae, tries to visit and ends up in a fight with Carlotta. Carlotta pushes to have the baby baptized right away, and insists the child be named Rowan. Deirdre insists on the last name Mayfair. Deirdre's life afterwards is spent mostly in mental institutions.

Part Two: The Mayfair Witches, Chapters 22-23 Analysis

The Talamasca tries to make sense of the deaths of Stella and Lionel, as well as Stuart and Arthur Langtry. They suspect Carlotta, except that it does not fit with her apparent extreme moral convictions. Antha lives a sad and sheltered life in the First Street house, where despite numerous attempts, no work can be done to repair the house. Aaron is sure that Carlotta drives Antha away. Antha lives on her purse of priceless (and always returning) coins. When an investigator talks to Antha at a museum, she becomes sad as he asks about her past. She wants to forget the world where she grew up, except to write about it. Antha does not understand about the legacy, and fears the power Carlotta seems to have over her. Sean's death destroys her emotionally.

Antha's death is suspicious to the Talamasca, because their reports are that she is happy and writing again after Deirdre's birth. Though she does not seem to wear the emerald necklace, she is wearing it when she dies. Reports of a furious battle between Carlotta and Cortland surface, but Carlotta convinces the judges that she, along with the other doting aunts, Millie, Belle, and Nancy, can take better care of the orphaned Deirdre better than anyone else.

Aaron comes to the Talamasca as a small child with telekinetic powers and the ability to read minds. He dedicates his life to studying the great witch families, and proceeds with the Mayfair case slowly and with caution.

In Chapter 23, Deirdre explains to Aaron that by studying Lasher, she would give him more power. Deirdre wants a normal life. She wants the priest to exorcise Lasher from her life, but the priest does not believe in the spirit. Even though she wants to follow her Aunt Carlotta's advice to drive him away by ignoring him, Lasher is always there for her when she feels sad and lonely.

Cortland can read Aaron's thoughts. He wants to kill Aaron, and is disappointed that his efforts are unsuccessful. Aaron feels the danger radiating from him and uses extreme caution in their meeting and after leaving. Aaron is surprised that Cortland is the murderer, not Carlotta.



Aaron watches the tragic story of Deirdre's life unfold, frustrated that he cannot do anything to help her. Carlotta insists on Rowan's name, as a way to ward off the evil that she believes is plaguing the family. She hopes to break the cycle by having Rowan removed to California. Deirdre feels defeated, but she does insist that the baby's last name be Mayfair, probably so that the legacy can continue.



Part Two: The Mayfair Witches, Chapters 24-27

Part Two: The Mayfair Witches, Chapters 24-27 Summary

Rowan is in the funeral parlor. When the Mayfairs discover who she is, they begin introducing themselves to her. Aaron approaches Rowan and tells her that he is there in Michael's place. She looks at Deirdre's body, and then Aaron guides her to another room. Rita Mae tells Rowan that Deirdre did not want to give her up.

Chapter 25 presents Aaron's summary for the Talamasca of Rowan's life. The summary includes character descriptions of Rowan, Ellie, and Graham, as well as descriptions of the circumstances around both Ellie's and Graham's deaths. The summary also includes evidence collected that Rowan is an extremely powerful telepathic and telekinetic. Though Rowan is attracted to research, her horror at Lemle's project pushes her into the operating room, where she performs miracles to save injured people every day. She is attracted to men who save lives, without forming attachments to them or telling them about her life. Aaron accidentally meets Rowan at Ellie's gravesite, where although she rejects his offer to talk, he gets a clear telepathic message from her stating that she knows she has killed. Aaron decides to wait and see before contacting her again.

In Chapter 26, Rowan is at the funeral mass and interment of Deirdre. After the funeral, several Mayfairs plan to meet at a restaurant, but Carlotta wants to walk home alone. Carlotta tells Rowan to meet her there when she is ready.

In Chapter 27, Michael finishes reading the last few sheets in the Mayfair file, including Aaron's interview with Deirdre's doctor, who sees Lasher away from the First Street house. Michael writes his impressions of the file in his journal and waits for Aaron so that they can talk about it.

Part Two: The Mayfair Witches, Chapters 24-27 Analysis

Rowan is overwhelmed by the number of Mayfairs and the confusion about why Ellie never wanted her to know this world. She wants Michael to place his hands on Deirdre to know about her life and whether she suffered. She wants to know why there needs to be such secrecy when everyone here seems to know who she is. She does not understand why Deirdre did not want to give her up, if everyone knows about her.

In Chapter 25, Ellie wants Rowan to have a normal life, suppressing any suggestion that she has special gifts or powers. Rowan uses her telepathic abilities with empathy as a



child, but a strange situation when a classmate dies of bone cancer causes her to stop using the power openly. Rowan knows about three of the people she has killed (though the first two are accidental), but she remains unaware of three others who have died after arguments with her. Aaron worries about how to approach Rowan throughout her life. He knows that crossing her can be deadly, but he wants to offer his help with her powers. On the other hand, he sees that she does not attempt to use her power for killing, and tries to make up for the accidental killings in the operating room. Aaron decides to watch and wait, as always, until there is either another death that can be attributed to Rowan, or she decides to go back to New Orleans. As Aaron wraps up his summary, he dreams of Stuart Townsend, who tells him that it is all planned, which touches on the theme of destiny.

In Chapter 26, Rowan cannot believe that she is still in America. The rituals surrounding death and the lifestyle in New Orleans are so different from her own life. Pierce explains that even though there are twelve crypts, many Mayfairs have been buried in the family crypt. Carlotta's response that the Mayfairs are in heaven or hell frightens him, as many of the Mayfairs seem to be frightened by Carlotta. Rowan notices the shape on the crypt, which resembles a keyhole.

Chapter 27 presents Michael's thoughts on the Mayfair file, as well as his own role in the new chapter of Mayfairs. Michael struggles with the conflict between his mission and his free will. He fears that predestination is at work, but that thought fills him with despair. He wonders what Lasher's agenda is, but he fears that it is evil.



Part Two: The Mayfair Witches, Chapters 30-32

Part Two: The Mayfair Witches, Chapters 30-32 Summary

Michael wakes and finds a note from Rowan. He leaves the hotel and tours his old neighborhood until he meets Rowan at the house in the afternoon. Rowan tells him she quit the hospital in San Francisco. They talk about their interpretations, Rowan's meeting with Aaron, and Lasher. Rowan wants Michael to restore the house. As they talk, Michael starts remembering flashes of the vision.

In Chapter 31, Rowan and Michael explore the house, investigating the possibility of restoring it. Michael continues to remember snatches of the vision. Rowan becomes angry again in Carlotta's room, and throws a religious statue, breaking it. Rowan wants Michael to touch the jewels. Finally, Michael agrees to remove his gloves, and he touches one of Deirdre's nightgowns. He sees a Mardi Gras parade, but it does not make sense to him. Once he starts touching things, it becomes a frenzy, until he goes up to Julien's room. He sees many ghosts. Rowan tries to get him to stop, but he touches the dolls and the heads in the jars. Lasher speaks to Michael through one of the heads. Michael rests and then he, Rowan and Aaron discuss his experience and the implications.

Chapter 32 describes Rowan's meetings with the lawyers about the legacy. She wants to use the money to build hospitals. The lawyers resist Rowan's desire to get involved, but reluctantly agree to give her an internship to help her understand the scope of the legacy. Rowan asks the lawyers to remove Carlotta's things from the house, perform their necessary inventory of the house's contents, and hire cleaning crews. Later at the house, Rowan meets Gerald Mayfair, who has come to remove Carlotta's things. He tells her that Aaron and Michael were at the cemetery when Carlotta was interred. He tells her that Carlotta asked him to burn the house after her death. Rowan is left alone at the house. She notices a vase of roses that look strange.

Part Two: The Mayfair Witches, Chapters 30-32 Analysis

Michael feels uneasy about Rowan reading the file without the explanations (and maybe omissions) that Michael promised to Aaron. Michael wonders if he was meant to leave New Orleans as part of this apparent plan. He discovers that the history has overwritten any memory of his vision. Rowan has a very scientific approach to Lasher. She wants to know what she can know based on what she can see, define, and understand. She is grateful to Aaron and the Talamasca for giving her the history. It helps her make sense



of her powers. The history makes the gift of the family that Rowan craves acceptable to her. Rowan knows that Carlotta wanted to be killed, and that the old woman provoked her so Rowan would do it, but it does not remove her guilt. Rowan tells Michael to forget the vision. She says that the beings will have to come again to tell him what they wanted. Rowan suggests that Michael's purpose is to kill her. She thinks the beings in the vision want the same thing Carlotta wanted - that is, to break the chain of witchcraft and end Lasher's power. Michael disagrees. Michael's remembered snatches of the vision point to the themes of destiny, patterns, and his purpose. Later Michael writes his impressions in his journal.

In Chapter 31, Michael is distracted by the pieces of the vision that start to come back to him. When he learns that the keyhole on the tomb matches the doorway of the house, he feels uneasy. Michael thinks about taking off his gloves, but he fears the power in his hands. His fears foreshadow what does happen when he removes the gloves. Rowan feels so much anger toward Carlotta, not only for provoking her own murder, but for raising Antha and Deirdre in such a sheltered, unloved way. Michael feels that breaking the statue is bad luck. Rowan presses him to use the power in his hands. Even though he does not want to, because he fears being overwhelmed by the images, he thinks that what Rowan wants is exactly what the beings in the vision wanted. When he starts touching things, he cannot stop. The Mayfair history helps him to understand what he sees, such as Antha crawling out the window to get away from Carlotta, as a ghost of Julien watches. Michael knows that Marguerite helped Lasher possess dead bodies. Michael and Rowan realize that Lasher permanently changes the bodies he possesses, but he cannot bring them back to life. Lasher's words to Michael through the decomposing head brings back the number thirteen from Michael's vision, and repeats Lasher's previous prophecy that he would be flesh. Michael thinks that Lasher wants Rowan to use her power to alter cells and matter. Rowan wants the family. She wants to reject Lasher, but she is seduced by him, just as the research Lemle had shown her was seductive to her. Aaron feels that he has accomplished his lifelong mission by providing Rowan with the history. He wants to teach Michael to control the power in his hands. Aaron believes that Lasher wants a human body. When Michael writes in his journal, he connects the drums he heard while touching Deirdre's nightgown with the flash he had after first getting together with Rowan.

In Chapter 32, Rowan plans to use the legacy to save lives, to atone for her own murders, as well as the tragedies in the Mayfair history. The metaphor of Rowan waiting at the door supports the continuing theme of the doorway, which is part of Lasher's goal. She compares the history itself to a brilliant jewel. Gerald's confession that Carlotta wanted to burn the house after her death shocks Rowan. He thinks that the patterns in the house make up a trap. Rowan does not feel Lasher's presence. She is happy to claim the house and the family, along with the legacy. The flowers she notices perplex her, but she tries to convince herself that one of the Mayfairs left them for her. However, the flowers are too big, and are already withering.



Part Three: Come Into My Parlor, Chapters 33-36

Part Three: Come Into My Parlor, Chapters 33-36 Summary

The house begins its transformation, as cleaning women start to work, and Michael begins hiring people to restore it. Ryan Mayfair's team takes the inventory for Deirdre's and Carlotta's estates. Rowan begins spending time with the extended family members. The lawyers suggest names of Mayfairs to whom she can bequest money. Aaron meets with Rowan and Michael after reading Julien's books, and admits that he fell down the stairs at the hotel.

In Chapter 34, Rowan gets up early and looks at the ancient coins and jewels. She sees the wind moving the trees outside and goes out to confirm what she saw.

In Chapter 35, Rowan and Michael make their stay in New Orleans official by getting Louisiana driver's licenses and buying cars. Rowan tells Michael of her plans to change her focus in medicine by building hospitals and funding research projects. Rowan argues with her boss in San Francisco. Rowan invites Eugenia, Carlotta's live-in maid, to return to work caring for the house. They plan a getaway trip to Florida.

Chapter 36 takes place in Fort Walton, Florida, where Rowan buys a house and plans a place to store her boat. She notes that the trip is their real honeymoon. When they return home, Michael finds her crying late at night. They plan to get married.

Part Three: Come Into My Parlor, Chapters 33-36 Analysis

Michael remembers visiting the cemetery with Aaron to look for the doorway image that Rowan mentioned. He notes that the doorway, plus the twelve crypts make up thirteen portals, which connects the tomb to images in the vision and Lasher's prophecy. Rowan knows that the cousins are keeping things about the house from her. Michael challenges Lasher with the workers, remembering that Lasher has not allowed much repair work to be done since Stella's death. He feels they are being watched. Aaron is disappointed that Julien's books do not contain his autobiography, as he hoped. They only contain short entries, probably of vendettas. Rowan becomes angry that Lasher appears to be pestering Aaron. Michael is happy working on the house being with Rowan and trying to forget the vision.

In Chapter 34, Rowan longs to be "one of them." She feels a conflict between her hate of Lasher for violating her and for causing so much destruction to her family, especially



her mother and grandmother, Deirdre and Antha, and between her lust for his power and mystery. Rowan wonders why Lasher does not choose to show himself to her.

In Chapter 35, Rowan stresses the need to think for herself. She wants redemption for the Mayfair history. Michael still feels uneasy, and that everything is connected or predestined. Michael also feels the possibility of redemption for his own errors. He cannot forget the tomb with the thirteen portals. Rowan's boss in San Francisco thinks that she is turning her back on medicine for her inheritance. She cannot convince him that only her scope has changed.

Michael enjoys the vacation in Chapter 36, but he is happy to return to New Orleans, which already feels like home again. They both decide that Lasher will not show himself until he is ready. Rowan cries late at night, disappointed that she is not pregnant. Michael feels happy at the prospect of marrying Rowan and having a child together, but he hesitates. Everything feels too good to be true.



Part Three: Come Into My Parlor, Chapters 37-39

Part Three: Come Into My Parlor, Chapters 37-39 Summary

Rowan dreams that she must use her powers to help a strange man with tiny organs. She wakes and finds the emerald around her neck. Rowan takes the emerald to Mayfair and Mayfair, where she learns that she must wear it for her wedding. She decides not to tell Michael about the necklace when she sees him.

In Chapter 38, Rowan and Michael announce their engagement. Beatrice, one of the cousins, convinces Rowan to wait a few extra weeks to have the wedding. Michael removes his gloves to touch Beatrice's hand and receives a clear message that she is innocent. Michael returns to the hotel to find a photograph of Deborah's portrait from the Talamasca. He asks Rowan if she would tell him if she saw Lasher. They discuss a strange flower. Later, Michael goes to First Street by himself. He decides to go for a swim. As soon as he gets into the water, he nearly drowns as he sees images as if he is at Stella's last party. A ghost, who Michael believes to be Arthur Langry, tells him to get out of the water. Michael returns to the hotel and tells Aaron about the event. He tells Rowan at dinner. She responds by checking his heart. The lawyers start work on developing the Mayfair Medical Center that Rowan wants. Michael makes plans to reopen his Great Expectations business in New Orleans.

In Chapter 39, the Mayfairs are gathering at Cortland's house in Metairie to celebrate the anticipation of Michael and Rowan's upcoming wedding. The family accepts not only Michael, but his Aunt Vivian, their friend Aaron, and his slightly modified Talamasca story. Rowan presses the family to share their secrets. The older Mayfairs tell her about the secret pact, and Stella's attempts to make the legend come true. They start talking about "the man," who would become flesh when the prophecy comes true. Peter describes seeing "the man" at one of Stella's parties. Gifford warns Rowan how dangerous "the man" is. After the party, Michael, Rowan, and Aaron analyze the new information about the number thirteen. Michael realizes that Rowan is the thirteenth witch. Rowan tells Michael to stop letting his visions and the unseen forces manipulate him. She asks Aaron to give her away at the wedding.

Part Three: Come Into My Parlor, Chapters 37-39 Analysis

Rowan's dream foreshadows Lasher's birth. The imagery of the emerald-like blood is also used as foreshadowing. Rowan hates Lasher for bringing the emerald, just as much as she had felt violated when he touched her. She knows the flowers that look



wrong are Lasher's attempt to change matter. When Rowan finds out the legacy stipulation that she wear the emerald at her wedding, she realizes that Lasher is approving of her marriage to Michael. She does not want to upset Michael or see him weak.

The Mayfair lawyers investigate Michael, struggling with their prejudice against him because he comes from the Irish Channel. However, others in the family feel comfortable enough with him to ask about his gloves. His flash when he touches Beatrice's hand is a clear message, which he thinks is strange, but an improvement over the jumbled images he usually gets. Michael does not recognize the picture of Deborah from his vision. Michael finds the near drowning in the pool scary, but intriguing. He does not want to tell Rowan because he does not want to upset her, but Aaron convinces him to tell her. Rowan does worry about the incident at the pool, just as Michael suspected. Michael feels overwhelmed that his life seems to be going so perfectly. He wonders if his purpose has already happened. He seems to know that something is coming.

Michael is grateful that nothing supernatural happens in the weeks leading to the wedding. Rowan senses how much everyone in the family hated Carlotta. Michael wonders about the pictures that were all taken at the front door of the house. He realizes that the pictures are where he saw the doorway, and he connects that with the portal on the tomb. The older Mayfairs reveal that the pact has to do with thirteen witches and a doorway, which would save the witches by opening the doorway between the two worlds. Rowan assures the family that she is not frightened of the spirit, and that she will do the right thing. Michael gets upset about the possibility of Rowan's purpose in Lasher's plans. Rowan is rational. She thinks that perhaps Michael's purpose is to make sure she returns to the New Orleans, and keeps her there to give birth to the next generation of the legacy. Rowan plans to use her power to destroy Lasher when she gets a chance. Rowan realizes that Michael is not strong enough to help her when the time comes. She wants to protect him.



Part Four: The Devil's Bride, Chapters 40-43

Part Four: The Devil's Bride, Chapters 40-43 Summary

Rowan and Michael's wedding and reception take place in Chapter 40. Michael sees something that scares him during the reception, but he does not tell Rowan what it is. Ryan kicks everyone out of the house so that Rowan and Michael can begin their wedding night together. Rowan starts feeling sick and goes down to the kitchen. In the kitchen, Lasher speaks to Rowan and tells her to come to him without telling Michael or Aaron. Rowan returns to the bedroom, and Michael realizes that Rowan is nauseous because she is pregnant.

In Chapter 41, Rowan is anxious to leave for the honeymoon. She and Michael talk about the baby. Rowan worries about what to do about Lasher. She also wonders about her powers and fears she might hurt her developing baby. Rowan sees Lasher on the beach, and she hears his voice in her head. Rowan insists that he disappear until she is ready for him. She imagines destroying him, but she keeps her secret. Rowan keeps extending the time in Florida, not wanting to return to the family and the house just yet. Michael tells her he must go to San Francisco. Rowan decides to wait for him at the First Street house.

In Chapter 42, Lasher and Rowan meet. Lasher asks Rowan to use her power to change his form, but he cannot hold it for long. Rowan asks Lasher about himself. Lasher tells her that Michael's interpretation that Rowan is the thirteenth witch is correct. They discuss what it means for Rowan to be the doorway. Lasher describes what he envisions when he becomes flesh. Lasher tells Rowan what happened with Stella, Cortland, and Deirdre. He tells her that Aaron and the Talamasca's true purpose is to stop Lasher from becoming flesh. Lasher tells Rowan that she cannot destroy him. He says that if she chooses not to help him, he will wait until someone else does. Rowan lets Lasher touch her intimately. Even though her secret thoughts are to continue the lovemaking and be surrounded by illusions, Rowan wants to talk more with Lasher. She asks about Michael, but succumbs to the temptation of letting Lasher continue to touch her.

In Chapter 43, Rowan continues to talk with Lasher rather than attend to getting back to her real life. Then Rowan walks to the hotel and talks with Aaron. She explains what she understands of the type of creature Lasher is. Rowan and Aaron discuss what it would mean if Lasher becomes flesh. Rowan warns Aaron.



Part Four: The Devil's Bride, Chapters 40-43 Analysis

Rowan feels a little guilty for breaking her vow to Ellie, but she is entranced by the large family and the rituals forced on her by the legacy. She never would have picked a white dress Catholic wedding, but she finds that she loves it. She compares the emerald necklace to the religious statues with the exposed hearts. Rowan is tired of being lonely. At the reception, when she sees Michael sweating and staring, she knows he is seeing something that shouldn't be there, but she does not press him about it. When the newlyweds are finally alone, Michael declares it the "witching hour," giddy that they are now alone. The irony is that Lasher is waiting for a chance to speak to Rowan alone. Rowan is frightened by him. He tells her that if she tells Michael about him, Michael will become miserable. Rowan knows it is true, so she keeps the visitation to herself. She is intrigued and enticed by the spirit. Michael is delighted to realize that Rowan is expecting.

In Chapter 41, Michael is really excited about the baby and looking forward to Christmas. Rowan knows that if she tells Michael and Aaron about Lasher, the spirit will keep playing tricks on them. She does not want to cause that tension, so she keeps the secret. Rowan worries that Lasher could hurt her baby, but she also worries that she could hurt the child. Rowan wants to find out more about Lasher so that she can destroy him, so she and Michael and their child can have a normal, happy life without spirits and curses. Rowan's dream comes again as foreshadowing of Lasher's birth. Rowan pictures herself destroying Lasher's cells, but she remains fearful. Michael has too many responsibilities to take a long vacation. He is content and agreeable, however, but he finally needs to get back both to New Orleans and San Francisco to take care of his responsibilities. Rowan realizes that she wants to talk to Lasher. She finds Michael's need to leave very convenient to Lasher's aims. She is conflicted between her desire to do as everyone expects and not fall into the curse of the previous Mayfair witches, and her seduction into finding out more about Lasher.

In Chapter 42, Rowan finally calls for Lasher while Michael is gone. She waits until midnight. She knows that Aaron knows she is keeping this secret. Rowan is very excited by seeing Lasher now. She no longer fears him. Lasher explains that he knew she would be coming, and that he has loved her for centuries. He explains how loving Suzanne created desire in him to be human, or better than human, so that he could see and feel and hear. Lasher wants to kill Aaron, because Aaron could interfere with Lasher's ambition to become flesh. Lasher explains that he loves Michael because he can see him. Rowan resists what she thinks she must do to help Lasher, but Lasher insists that she has both the power and the knowledge to further his aims. Rowan becomes more and more sympathetic to Lasher as he talks. She understands his loneliness. She understands his suffering. Lasher helps her to understand his mistakes and Carlotta's tricks. Lasher tells Rowan that other discarnate beings have become flesh.

Rowan questions what Lasher would have to give up to become flesh. Lasher responds that it would be nothing compared to the suffering he feels as he waits. Lasher says that



he is not evil, or an enemy of the world. He simply wants to become part of it. Lasher's description of himself when he becomes flesh is foreshadowing. He describes himself as a helpless infant, and that Rowan would be his mother. This simile gives meaning to the phantom sounds of crying infants that appear in the novel with growing frequency. Rowan's conflict continues, but the side of helping Lasher is gaining strength.

In Chapter 43, Lasher compares his experiments with Marguerite to caveman times. He explains that Rowan's medical knowledge makes his ambition possible. Rowan asks Aaron why he lied. Aaron claims he has given her all of the Talamasca's knowledge, but when she presses him, he begs her not to help Lasher. Rowan describes Lasher as a "giant colony of microscopic cells" (Chapter 43, p. 953). Rowan wants to know why it is wrong to help Lasher. She sees him as natural—a mutation of what we know now. Aaron warns that he would be dangerous. Rowan sees the possibilities in him as a possible path to immortality. Aaron wants her to shield her thoughts from Lasher to gain time to make a moral decision. Rowan knows that Michael's role was to get her to New Orleans and keep her there. Aaron knows about the baby. Rowan warns Aaron to leave, because she can only keep Lasher from killing him for so long. She also warns that she will kill him if he tells Michael about Lasher.



Part Four: The Devil's Bride, Chapters 44-47

Part Four: The Devil's Bride, Chapters 44-47 Summary

In San Francisco, Michael experiences a string of bad luck. He packs up his Christmas ornament collection to send to New Orleans. He has a flash of seeing Lasher as a child, and he starts to panic. He leaves to find his car vandalized, and someone he believes to be Julien's ghost tells him to go home. When he tries to catch up to the man, he is gone, but he thinks he sees the face on the bus. Michael stops, remembering part of the vision again, and is almost hit by a bus. Michael decides to call Ryan for help with finishing the packing. Ryan arranges for Michael to go back to New Orleans by private plane. Michael calls Rowan and asks her to protect him.

In Chapter 45, Beatrice chides Rowan for staying alone in the house too much. After she leaves, Rowan asks Lasher why he tried to hurt Michael. She knows that she cannot do what Aaron suggests to block Lasher from perceiving her thoughts. She knows that Michael will find out about her and Lasher sooner or later. Rowan refuses to kill to help Lasher. She has her dream again, involving Petyr van Abel and his father, her old boss Larkin, and Lemle, as well as the strange man on the table with tiny organs. Michael returns while she sleeps. Lasher comes to her and Rowan wants him to maintain his form. He almost fuses with the matter he has collected. Lasher tells Rowan to lie to Michael if she loves Michael. Rowan finally wakes and decorates the tree with Michael's wonderful collection of ornaments.

Michael compares the coming possibility of a white Christmas to the white Christmas the year his father died and he moved to San Francisco in Chapter 46. He has to do some errands, and tells the baby goodbye before he leaves. He thinks he hears the Mardi Gras parade drums again.

In Chapter 47, Rowan asks Lasher what he promised the other witches. Rowan realizes that it may be possible, if she is successful with Lasher, that she herself may become immortal. Lasher tells her that her dreams tell her what she needs to do.

Part Four: The Devil's Bride, Chapters 44-47 Analysis

Michael's bad luck feels as if forces are contriving to keep him there as long as possible. He thinks that Lasher has orchestrated the events to get him to the dangerous corner to be killed by the bus, but Michael thinks that the witches from his visions have saved him. He believes it is Julien who tells Michael to go home because he is needed there. Michael does sense something different in Rowan's voice when they talk on the phone. When he remembers seeing Lasher as a child, he knows that the spirit must have shown himself to Rowan by now.



In Chapter 45, Beatrice, who represents all of the Mayfairs, is worried about Rowan staying in the house by herself while Michael is gone so long. When Beatrice leaves, Rowan talks more with Lasher, still struggling to understand what her role is in his ambitions. The baby she is expecting plays a role in her recurrent dream. The dream justifies her desire to keep her dealings with Lasher a secret from Michael, Aaron, and the rest of the Mayfair family. In the dreams Petyr tells her not to do what she needs to do. After Michael returns, she slips back into the dream. Lemle's appearance in the dream is significant, as is the fact that the body on the table is really a fetus. This dream is more foreshadowing of what happens with Lasher's birth. Lasher convinces Rowan that everyone will be happier if she continues to lie to Michael by not telling him about Lasher. She knows it is true, but she also knows that she cannot keep the secret much longer. However, when she is with Michael she would rather forget the supernatural world and just be normal. She says that she never wants him to leave again.

In Chapter 46, Michael remembers the accident that killed his father, and feeling guilty about being excited about going to California. Michael is looking forward to Christmas, especially special because of the baby they are expecting. He is leaving again to do some errands, and thinks that he hears the Mardi Gras drums again.

In Chapter 47, Rowan finds out that each witch made a pact with Lasher. Lasher promised to obey the witches' every command. In return, they must each bear a female child to pass on the power and the ability to command Lasher. Lasher thinks that by becoming flesh, Suzanne and Deborah's deaths would be avenged. Rowan knows that Lasher is afraid of the surrender that would be required for him to become flesh. He has almost bonded with the random materials he collects to appear visible. However, Lasher is waiting for the perfect form before he surrenders. Lasher knows that Rowan's dream tells her what to do. He also tells her it is almost time for him to be reborn. He tells her she is his mother. Yet, Rowan still does not realize what Lasher wants.



Part Four: The Devil's Bride, Chapters 48-50

Part Four: The Devil's Bride, Chapters 48-50 Summary

In Chapter 48, Michael meets with Aaron. He talks about the vision and the near accident in San Francisco. Michael expresses his fears about Rowan. Aaron tells Michael that Rowan forbade him to tell Michael about Lasher. They talk more about Lasher and the battle they expect. Aaron gives Michael a medal of St. Michael, the archangel.

In Chapter 49, Rowan goes to the cemetery to see the Mayfair tomb again. Lasher promises that she will never die. Rowan asks what he promised the other witches. Instead of answering, Lasher reminds Rowan that the dead are no longer here. She is the only one who matters to him now. Lasher tells Rowan to make Michael leave the next day.

In Chapter 50, Michael and Rowan have just finished a grand party with lots of family members for Christmas. Michael tries to talk with Lasher, but he gets no answer. He looks forward to Christmas Eve. Rowan wakes from her recurrent nightmare and tells Michael a little about it. Rowan begs Michael not to ask about Lasher, asking him silently to trust her. They fall asleep. When Michael wakes, Rowan is gone. He goes out to shop for the Christmas Eve feast. He waits at the First Street house alone for her. When Rowan finally arrives, Michael wants to begin the feast, but she tells him to leave. When he does not immediately go, Rowan slaps him. He still resists leaving. Rowan injects Michael with a drug and sends him away to stay with Aaron.

Part Four: The Devil's Bride, Chapters 48-50 Analysis

Michael knows that Rowan has been meeting Lasher. He feels angry and worried. He is convinced that Julien and Deborah were in his vision, and that they are on his side, not Lasher's side. Michael believes that Rowan has changed, now that she is in Lasher's spell. Aaron reminds Michael that maybe loving Rowan is all he needs to do to win against Lasher. Michael wants help from Aaron, but Aaron states that he is not really involved anymore. Aaron compares Lasher to the spirit of a dead person that is earthbound. Michael is upset that the battle with Lasher seems to be coming at this time of year. Christmas is his favorite time of year. He treats it like New Year's Day by using it to assess his life both past and future. He feels that everything is connected, even the timing of Rowan's involvement with Lasher. The medal that Aaron gives Michael is meant to give Michael strength for his battle against Lasher.

Rowan is still reluctant to do what Lasher wants in Chapter 49. She goes to the cemetery to see the doorway. If Lasher is promising her immortality, she wants to know



what he promised the other witches. A thought of her baby makes her think of something that Lemle had said to her in that research lab that she found so horrible. He regretted all of the aborted babies that were lost, not for the people those embryos never became, but for the organs that could have been used medically. Lasher threatens to kill Michael if he is present or tries to interfere with his plans.

Michael usually looks forward to Christmas Eve. It is his favorite night of the year. It is a time when he evaluates his life both past and future. He is especially excited about this Christmas Eve, because of the baby he and Rowan are expecting, but in Chapter 50, his feelings become bitter. He is very unhappy about the change in Rowan. He knows that Lasher is coming between them and he is afraid to say anything. He knows from reading the history that he will be killed if he is not careful. He dreads the night, somehow knowing that things are about to happen with Lasher. When Rowan tells Michael to leave, he feels confused. He wants things to be right between them. He wants to help her fight Lasher. She does not listen, however, and he feels stunned when she slaps him. Rowan knows that she needs to be alone because she is lured into Lasher's promises of immortality. She has already decided to help him, and deal with the consequences later. She does not know how to explain this to Michael. She does not want to lose Michael, so she knows she must do as Lasher asks. She tries telling him to get out, and she tries pleading for his life to get out, but when he does not agree, she falls back on drugging him to get him out of the house.



Part Four: The Devil's Bride, Chapters 51-52

Part Four: The Devil's Bride, Chapters 51-52 Summary

Rowan waits to do what Lasher wants, still unsure of how it will be accomplished. She encourages him to surrender to the form he creates, but Lasher will not be lured into an inanimate shell. Lasher tells Rowan that he knows she will do what he wants. Lasher reaches into Rowan's womb for the baby. Rowan hears the baby's cry and sees the strange body from her nightmare. Lasher uses his power to grow the body, and Rowan finds herself using her power to help him. When the merging is complete, Lasher tells Rowan to stop her own bleeding. She sleeps and wakes to find a man with the soft skin of a newborn. She screams, but Lasher reminds her that he needs her help. Rowan is amazed by his body. Rowan and Lasher plan to leave so that Rowan can study Lasher's body.

In Chapter 52, Michael wakes from his drug-induced sleep. When he wakes in the morning at the Talamasca Motherhouse, he wants to go back to New Orleans immediately. He returns to the First Street house and sees Lasher's strange newborn, but man-sized body. Michael wants to kill him. Rowan tries to stop him. Michael is only able to hurt Lasher a little with his attack. Lasher pushes Michael into the swimming pool, where Michael drowns again. He sees a burning place full of all of the Mayfair witches, plus the nuns from his childhood. The witches tell him that this was the plan all along, and that now Michael can join them to wait for their turn to go back into a body. A firefighter rescues Michael, and Aaron is also there when he wakes from the nightmarish vision.

Part Four: The Devil's Bride, Chapters 51-52 Analysis

Rowan is still conflicted. She is curious about the science of bringing Lasher into a body, but she does not want to help him. When she realizes he wants her embryo, she is horrified. She resists and tries to fight him, but Lasher knows that she will not kill her own baby. Rowan says that she tried to trick Lasher. Rowan finds herself helping Lasher, knowing that she does not want to let him die. She feels defeated, as if Lasher has won without a fight. He uses her own curiosities and weaknesses against her. Lasher is right. Rowan's curiosity wins over her horror quickly. She wants to get away so that she can study Lasher without being bothered by the family.

In Chapter 52, Michael knows that he has lost Rowan to Lasher. He remembers seeing Lasher in front of the crib on Christmas Eve, the memory of a long-ago foreshadowing for the future. Lasher telepathically tells Michael that he used him. Lasher reveals that he had always loved Michael because he wanted him to be his father. Michael wants to kill him, but Lasher does not think he will kill his own child. When Michael begins



beating Lasher, Lasher pushes him into the pool. Michael drowns and sees another vision. This time, all of the Mayfair witches are in a hellish place with fire and writing bodies. The witches blame Michael for creating such an awful image. They tell him that they knew that the first time he drowned, he agreed to their demands only because he was bargaining for his life. They made him forget that vision so that he would still get together with Rowan and help to complete Lasher's plan.



Epilogue, Chapters 53-54

Epilogue, Chapters 53-54 Summary

Michael has a heart attack after his drowning and spends the next several weeks in the hospital. Ryan tells Michael that the family realizes that Rowan has left without adequate evidence of foul play. Rowan goes to Europe and begins transferring money from her accounts. She leaves the house to Michael. Michael decides not to tell the family about what happened. He writes in his diary.

In Chapter 54, Michael writes about Lasher's birth and his vision when he drowned the second time. He has a party at the house for Mardi Gras and faces his childhood fears of the parade drums. Michael is amused when a child calls him "that man." Michael decides to stay in the house and wait for Rowan to come home to him.

Epilogue, Chapters 53-54 Analysis

In Chapter 53, Michael recovers from his drowning in the pool, and the heart attack that happened with it. He learns that Rowan has gone to Switzerland and wired for money. Michael believes that Rowan left Michael the house because she eventually wants to come back to him. Michael decides to stay silent about the supernatural events. Michael knows the house is now free of supernatural beings. He loses the power in his hands.

In Chapter 54, Michael analyzes the vision he from when he drowned in the pool. He believes that Lasher invented that vision to keep him dead, or at least slow him down while Lasher and Rowan escape. Michael hopes that Rowan will find a way to destroy Lasher, but he knows that she will not be able to do it. Michael finds his switch with Lasher as "the man" of First Street ironic. He feels angry that Lasher stole his wife and his child. He stops feeling angry toward Rowan because he knows she does not really deserve his rage. Michael knows that she would not be able to kill Lasher.



Characters

Michael Curry

Michael grows up in the Irish Channel section of New Orleans, the poor son of a firefighter and a mother from a formerly rich family in San Francisco. His mother marries his father after becoming pregnant with Michael during World War II. In Michael's youth, he often sees a strange man that his mother cannot see, often walking through the Garden District. Michael's father dies in a fire his senior year of high school. Michael and his mother return to San Francisco to live near his Aunt Vivian. In San Francisco, Michael lives a more refined life. He becomes educated and starts a construction company. He becomes rich by restoring the old houses that he loves, but he still has the build of a fireman, and the brogue of his youth. Michael has two serious relationships. One ends because he is not faithful. The second ends because his girlfriend wants to abort the child she accidentally conceives. He is distressed over the lost child and resolves not to have any other lost children.

Michael is at a crossroads in his life at the start of the novel. He has accomplished much, but has no close relationships. He is knocked down at the beach and nearly drowns. While he is unconscious, he has a vision but he cannot quite remember it when he is rescued. He feels that the beings from the vision gave him a mission, and he fears that he is letting them down because he has forgotten it. When Michael is rescued, he gains a psychic power with his hands. He can see images connected to things he touches. Michael finds the power an annoying distraction. He is superstitious to a fault, and he feels driven by the unseen forces that seem to be controlling his life.

Michael and Rowan fall in love as soon as they meet. Michael goes to New Orleans, driven to rediscover his purpose, as well as longing to go back to the home of his youth. When he discovers that Rowan is the new owner of the house he remembers from his youth, he starts to believe that everything in his life seems connected. In fact, there are several coincidences that convince him it is true. When Aaron approaches Michael about the Talamasca, Michael is tempted. It is just the kind of life that he could embrace, because of the crossroads in his life. However, now that he is in love with Rowan, he wants to be with her instead. He is thrilled when they marry and she gets pregnant. It is just what he feels his life is missing.

Michael is jealous of Lasher coming between Michael and Rowan. He is angry about Lasher stealing his wife, his baby, and his promised life from him. By the end of the novel, Michael becomes the man in the garden district that he himself had seen so many times as a child.



Rowan Mayfair

Rowan Mayfair is the Staff Attending in Neurosurgery working in a university Neurological Trauma center. She is tall, with short wavy, blonde hair. When she is six, she accidentally kills a girl on the playground with her mental powers. She also kills a would-be rapist. Rowan kills Graham, her adoptive father, when he threatens to leave his wife, even though she is dying of cancer. All three of Rowan's murders are attributed to a weakness in the blood vessels to the brain. Rowan throws herself into her work, hoping that by saving lives, she can redeem the evil she has accidentally caused. Rowan is attracted to heroes, simple men who do not demand anything from her, but she does not form any attachments. She and Graham argue about her lovers, and she lets him into her bed to stop him from leaving Ellie. After his death, she feels stalked by his memory and her rage for him.

Rowan works hard to win the loyalty of the nurses at the hospital. Rowan is repulsed (but a little tempted) by an offer from Dr. Lemle to do research with him. He harvests tissue from aborted fetuses in attempt to cure disease. She considers the work to be too much like killing, and she refuses to use her power to kill intentionally. She wonders what can redeem her telekinetic ability to kill, even though she refuses to use it. Rowan fears that she is a bad person, capable of great evil. She considers her telepathic power to read minds, especially when she is tired, as evil.

Rowan learns of her true family in New Orleans in Ellie's last days, and again from Aaron Lightner at Ellie's gravesite. After Graham and then Ellie die, Rowan is extremely lonely. She promises Ellie that she will never try to find out about her true family in New Orleans, or even ever set foot in New Orleans. However, when Carlotta calls to tell Ellie about Deirdre's death, and finds out that Ellie is also dead, she feels forced to tell Rowan about her biological mother. Rowan insists on seeing her mother before she is buried. Rowan decides that the vow she made to Ellie is worthless now. The fact that Michael is in New Orleans also encourages her to go there. Rowan falls in love with the enormous family. She never has to be lonely again.

When Rowan reads the Mayfair history, she is grateful. It helps her to understand her frightening power. She still does not understand how the power can be used for good, until she decides to use the legacy money to start a hospital. Rowan is repulsed by Lasher at first, because she feels that he violated her personal space by being intimate with her without her permission. However, after she and Michael marry, and Michael is out of town for too long, her curiosity about Lasher wins. She falls in love with the spirit. She wants to trick him into the flesh, and then kill him. She is also seduced by the possibilities that bringing Lasher to life present. She has not planned on Lasher using her own child, however. While she is horrified by what Lasher does to her baby, the body is alive; she has not actually killed, but helped to create a new life form. The scientist in her takes over, curious about the new being's cells and the possibility of replicating the experiment.



Aaron Lightner

Aaron Lightner is a British representative from the Talamasca. He presents himself as an old world gentleman and has a way of making people feel at ease. He can read minds, which helps him to collect information about the Mayfair family. He translates and summarizes the entire Mayfair history in the mid 1950s. His goal is to present the information to the Mayfair family, and allow them to decide what to do with the information. Aaron also wants to fight the powerful spirit Lasher. His first attempts, however, end with Cortland almost killing Aaron. He continues to watch the family for many years, waiting on the right time to approach them again.

Aaron approaches Michael, thinking of offering membership with the Talamasca because of the power in Michael's hands. However, he quickly realizes that Michael is already caught up in the Mayfair history himself. Because of Michael's involvement with Rowan, he is also the perfect person to present the Mayfair history to her. Aaron stays involved with the family after presenting the history because Michael and Rowan both have come to enjoy his friendship. Rowan, however, threatens to kill him if he tells Michael that she has started to meet with Lasher. Aaron wants Rowan to fight Lasher, but he knows that Lasher is very dangerous.

Lasher/The Man

Lasher is a spirit that Suzanne calls out of chaos. He is a storm-maker. He can bring small objects to the witch who commands him. He engenders loyalty in the witches with his pact. He promises to do their bidding if they promise to have a daughter to whom to pass on the powers and the legacy. He turns out to be the spirit of a long-dead person, ambitiously seeking a way to be brought back to life. He predicts that the thirteenth witch will be strong enough (and have the knowledge) to help him. He kills through trickery to suit his purposes. He takes Rowan's baby from her womb and merges his microscopic cells with it to become a man again.

Graham

Graham is Rowan's adoptive father. He is a womanizer who serves his wife with divorce papers while she is dying of cancer. He dies in Rowan's arms after an argument about the proposed divorce.

Ellie Mayfair

Ellie Mayfair is Rowan's adoptive mother and third cousin. She dies of cancer. Before she dies, she tells Rowan a little about the family in New Orleans.



Suzanne

Suzanne is a simple Scottish midwife who believes she is a witch. She calls together a spirit and names him Lasher. She is a past queen of the May Fair. She is burned at the stake. She is the first witch of the Mayfairs.

Deborah

Deborah is the second Mayfair witch. Because Deborah is a "merry-begot," conceived by the queen of the May Fair during the Spring festival, the townspeople do not want to burn her along with her mother when they normally would have. She might be any man's daughter, including the nobleman. Therefore, the town finds her lucky and does not want to condemn her. They are eager to let Petyr van Abel of the Talamasca (disguised as a young clergyman) take Deborah away. Deborah marries the painter Rembrandt van Rijn and becomes very rich.

After his death, she marries the Comte de Montclevé and moves to France. Before she goes, she seduces Petyr van Abel. She gives birth to Charlotte too soon after her marriage to the Comte, indicating the Petyr is Charlotte's father. She loves her second husband, but he is not faithful. Lasher causes the accident that kills the Comte because Lasher believes Deborah would want him killed. Her mother-in-law and sons use the death of the Comte to accuse Deborah of being a witch. However, Deborah does not die on the pyre. She calls Lasher, who destroys the town that has come to watch her execution, and she jumps from the roof. Her children Chrétien and Phillipe, as well as her mother-in-law die on the day of her execution.

Charlotte Mayfair

Charlotte Mayfair, the third Mayfair witch, marries Antoine Fontenay and moves away to Saint-Domingue. Though she comes back to France to get her mother's help with her husband's crippling illness, she escapes before Deborah's execution. When Petyr approaches her about what Deborah has warned him regarding Lasher, she seduces Petyr, even though he is her father, because she wants his strength and his height for her children, and her husband can no longer give her children. She gives birth to twins. She believes in her control over Lasher, but has to threaten Lasher with the removal of her love if he hurts Petyr.

Jeanne Louise Mayfair

Jeanne Louis Mayfair is the fourth witch and twin sister of Peter, who shared a bedroom suite with her and died within hours of her.



Angélique Mayfair

Angélique Mayfair is the only daughter of Jeanne Louise (and presumably her brother Peter). She represents the fifth generation of witches in the Mayfair family.

Marie Claudette Mayfair Landry

Marie Claudette Mayfair Landry is Angélique's daughter who runs the family's plantation in Saint-Domingue. Her powers allow her to leave the island unscathed before the slave uprising. Marie Claudette establishes the Mayfair legacy and purchases the Riverbend plantation. Her slaves knew they could not deceive her. One of her daughters is feeble-minded.

Marguerite Mayfair

Marguerite is daughter of Marie Claudette and the seventh Mayfair witch. She marries Tyrone Clifford McNamara, who is an opera singer and mothers Rémy, Julien, and Katherine. She has a voodoo altar and collects jars of human skulls, and other disgusting things. Several of her slaves suffered cases of possession. She stole slave's babies. Her second husband seems a mystery, although he was the registered father of Katherine Mayfair.

Katherine Mayfair

Katherine Mayfair is the eighth witch of the Mayfair family, although she does not have the power of her mother. She marries Darcy Monahan and loses several children. The loss of those children, plus Darcy's death, devastate her, and she becomes a little crazy. Although she and Darcy build the house at First Street in New Orleans, she does not live there after Darcy's death until the Riverbend plantation house is taken by the river. She gives birth to Mary Beth too long after Darcy's death, leaving the Talamasca to surmise that Julien, Katherine's brother, is probably Mary Beth's father.

Mary Beth Mayfair

Mary Beth Mayfair is the ninth witch in the Mayfair family and mother to Belle, Carlotta, Lionel and Stella. The First Street townhouse is their home. Mary Beth goes to Europe with Julien (her uncle and father) and comes home with feeble-minded daughter Belle. The Lord Mayfair she supposedly married in Europe never existed, so Julien is probably Belle's father. Mary Beth marries Daniel McIntyre. She is a cross-dresser who can see the future.



Stella Louise Mayfair

Stella Louise inherits the legacy from Mary Beth instead of Carlotta, because Carlotta does not want to help Lasher. Stella is therefore the tenth witch in the Mayfair family. She never bothers to marry when she gives birth to Antha. No one even knows who Antha's father is, although the Talamasca suspects it is either Lionel, her brother, or Julien, her uncle/grandfather, or Cortland, one of Julien's sons. Mary Beth adopts an illegitimate child, Nancy, and presents her as Stella's daughter. Stella likes to give big parties. She tries to get thirteen witches together to help Lasher come through, but she does not really understand Lasher's prophecy. Lionel kills Stella.

Antha Marie Mayfair

Antha is the eleventh witch in the Mayfair family. She sees her mother's murder as a child and has a very unhappy life being raised by her aunt Carlotta in the house where no repairs can be made. Ten years after her mother's death, Antha runs away to New York, getting involved with the writer and poet scene. She gets pregnant by Sean Lacy, a painter, who does not want the baby. He dies in a highway accident. Antha returns home in shame with Deidre as a baby. She jumps out of the attic window to get away from Carlotta, who has scratched out her eye. She dies when Deirdre is just a baby.

Deirdre Mayfair

Deirdre Mayfair also has an unhappy childhood being raised by her great-aunt Carlotta in the gloomy First Street house, until she finally goes to live with Cortland and goes away to college. She tries to forget being a witch and commander of Lasher (she is the twelfth Mayfair witch), but she gets pregnant and goes back to live with Carlotta. The story that she is going to marry her college professor, who ends up dying in a car accident, is a cover for the fact that Cortland is the baby's father. When Cortland dies, she curses to the air, giving Carlotta reason to call her delusional. Deirdre is forced to give up her baby to adoption and undergoes numerous psychiatric treatments, including excessive shock treatments that wipe out her memory. She spends the rest of her short life heavily sedated, sitting on the porch at First Street, wearing a nightgown and her enormous heirloom jewels.

Dr. Petrie

Dr. Petrie is Deirdre's doctor for awhile. He is supposed to give her a daily sedative injection. He is taken off the case after Lasher tries to get him to stop the shots.



Carlotta Mayfair

Carlotta Mayfair lawyer is one of the first women to graduate from Loyola University. She uses huge donations of money to keep people quiet about the family gossip. She is a powerful witch as well as her sister Stella, but she chooses not to help Lasher. She spends her life trying to ensure that Lasher does not get what he wants. However, by forcing Deirdre to give Rowan up for adoption, Carlotta creates the perfect environment for Rowan to develop to become Lasher's mother. She is very bitter and most of the family dislikes her, although they also fear her.

Miss Millie

Miss Millie is one of Deirdre's aunts. She is the mildly retarded daughter of Rémy (Marguerite's son) who lives in the First Street house with Carlotta.

Miss Nancy

Miss Nancy is one of Deirdre's aunts living in the house with Carlotta. She is an illegitimate child of Louis Mayfair that Mary Beth adopts and presents as Antha's sister, which no one seems to question. Nancy is the one who presides over the house cleaning. She bullies Deidre, and patronizes the nurse.

Miss Belle

Miss Belle is the retarded daughter of Mary Beth and probably Julien. She is one of Deirdre's old aunts who lives in the First Street house with Carlotta.

Father Mattingly

Father Mattingly is the parish priest to the Mayfairs when Deirdre is little. He hears Deirdre's confession and wants to talk to Carlotta about Lasher, which is a big mistake.

Julien Mayfair

Julien Mayfair is Katherine's brother, and possibly the most powerful witch of his generation. He manages the Riverbend plantation and kills his cousin Augustin. He opposes Katherine's marriage and becomes her companion after her husband's death. He marries Suzette Mayfair and fathers Barclay, Garland, and Cortland. He also has male lovers, including Richard Llewellyn, who gives the Talamasca information about the Mayfairs. He apparently leaves the pact and an extensive autobiography in writing, which are destroyed by Mary Beth after his death.



Cortland Mayfair

Cortland Mayfair is Julien's son who lives in Metairie. He is Deirdre's uncle and protector against Carlotta. He dies after a fall down the stairs when he fights with Lasher. He is assumed to be Rowan's father.

Amanda Grady Mayfair

Amanda Grady Mayfair is Cortland's wife who provides information to the Talamasca.

Ryan Mayfair

Ryan Mayfair is Cortland's grandson and the current principal partner of Mayfair and Mayfair when Rowan comes to New Orleans.

Beatrice Mayfair

Beatrice Mayfair is one of the Mayfair cousins. She represents the rest of the family to Michael and Rowan.

Eugenia

Eugenia is the housekeeper who lives with Carlotta, and stays when Michael and Rowan take over the house.

Petyr van Abel

Petyr van Abel is member of the Talamasca in the mid 1600s. His father was a doctor who dies when Petyr is young. Petyr rescues Deborah from Scotland. Later, he witnesses Deborah's death. He travels to Saint-Domingue to give Charlotte a message from her mother. He realizes that he is Charlotte's father from his coupling with Deborah before she leaves for France. Charlotte imprisons Petyr to force him to father a child with his strength, so he becomes both father and grandfather of the next generation of Mayfair witches. His letters provide extensive information to the Talamasca about the first generations of the Mayfairs. He dies in a cemetery, presumably tricked by Lasher.

Stuart Townsend

Stuart Townsend is Talamasca member who has lost 10 years of his childhood while he is possessed by a mysterious French girl. He turns to the Talamasca to cope with his strange childhood. He approaches Stella about the Talamasca's history of the Mayfairs,



but disappears. It turns out that he was murdered by Carlotta and rolled up in a carpet left in the attic of the First Street house.

Jerry Lonigan

Jerry Lonigan and his father Red are undertakers for the Mayfairs.

Rita Mae Lonigan

Rita Mae Lonigan is Deirdre's best friend at St. Rose's de Lima's boarding school. She tries to help Deirdre when she is being forced to give up her baby to adoption, and she gives information to the Talamasca.

Sister Bridget Marie

Sister Bridget Marie is a nun and teacher at the parochial school where Stella, Antha, and Deirdre are all her students (and all expelled). She knows about Lasher.



Objects/Places

The Talamasca

The Talamasca is an organization that watches and helps people through supernatural experiences.

First Street House

The First Street house is an antebellum mansion in the Garden District of New Orleans. The doorways look like keyholes.

Irish Channel

The Irish Channel is a section of New Orleans where Michael Curry grows up, consisting of narrow double houses and a corner bar.

Maye Faire

Maye Faire is the name of the Mayfair family's plantation in Saint-Domingue (Haiti).

Riverbend

Riverbend is the plantation where the Mayfairs live after leaving Saint-Domingue. It is too close to the river, and ends up being taken by the river.

Sweet Christine

The Sweet Christine is Rowan Mayfair's boat. The boat is a little too big for a single person to handle, but Rowan learns to take her out alone by the time she is sixteen. Rowan always retreats to the boat after her long shifts at the hospital, no matter how exhausted she is.

The Emerald Necklace

Deborah first sees the large emerald necklace when Petyr brings her to Amsterdam. She quickly obtains the resources to buy it from Lasher. It has Lasher's name engraved on the back. She wears it in the portrait painted by her first husband. The necklace is like a talisman for the witches to call Lasher.



The Bottomless Purse

The Mayfair witches have a purse full of ancient coins that always return to the purse.

St. Rose de Lima's

St. Rose de Lima's is the boarding school where Rita Mae and Deirdre are friends.

St. Alphonsus

St. Alphonsus is the big parish church and school the Mayfairs use in New Orleans during the nineteen hundreds.

Mayfair Tomb

The Mayfair tomb in New Orleans consists of twelve vaults at the Lafayette No. 1 cemetery. It has a long open door looks that looks like a keyhole. It is surrounded by a wrought-iron fence around it, and has vases that are always full of flowers.

The Legacy

The legacy is the inheritance that goes to one Mayfair daughter in each generation. The legacy requires the women to keep the name Mayfair when they marry and wear the emerald necklace at their wedding.

Demonologie

Demonologie is a book used by witch judges to find witches in the 1600s. A witch judge taught it to Suzanne, who used the principles to call Lasher out of chaos.

Dolls

Michael and Rowan find a chest full of dolls made of human hair and bone in the attic. Presumably, each witch made a doll from her mother's body, and used it to call on the spirits of her ancestors.

Jars with Human Heads

Margeruite's conducted experiments at Riverbend with Lasher. Lasher was able to inhabit the heads and change their features, but he was no able to bring the dead



bodies back to life. Michael smashes the jars and uses the power in his hands to find out about these experiments.

The Portait of Deborah

Deborah's first husband painted a portrait of her with the emerald necklace. The Talamasca acquires it and has it in their vaults. Aaron gets a photo of the portrait for Michael. A copy is made to hang in the First Street house for the day of Michael and Rowan's wedding.



Themes

Predestination versus Free Will

Michael is a very superstitious character who cannot help but see the coincidences in his life that lead him to Rowan, the house on First Street, and maybe even playing straight into Lasher's desire to be reborn. He repeatedly has an intuitive feeling that everything that happens to he and Rowan is planned. However, his belief in his vision from the first drowning overshadows everything else that he does. He believes the beings from that vision are benevolent, and that they gave him an honorable mission. He keeps waiting for those beings to direct him what to do so he can complete the mission. He wonders if he is meant to be who he is and if he is meant to be with Rowan. With a little encouragement from Aaron, he moves forward with his own agenda of restoring the house, marrying Rowan, and relocating his business to New Orleans. However, every choice he makes feels like defiance against the beings from his vision.

Michael constantly resists the idea that his life is predestined. However, when he drowns the second time and sees a vision of hell where all of the Mayfair witches are waiting to be born again, Cortland tells him this is exactly the case. His life is predetermined. Cortland says that Michael is in the witches' hands from the very beginning. Michael despairs that his whole life, including his father's death while fighting a fire, is controlled by Lasher and the witches. Rowan encourages him to think for himself, and not to allow himself to be used. However, Michael is not able to do this, because when he tries to intervene the first time, Rowan drugs him. When he tries to intervene the second time, Lasher pushes him into the swimming pool. Lasher not only uses Michael for his own goals, but then he steals his wife and baby.

When he wakes to find Rowan gone with Lasher, Michael refuses to believe the second vision. He writes, "I can't believe it because my reason tells me that such a system, in which anyone dictates our every move—be it a god, or a devil, or our subconscious mind, or our tyrannical genes—is simply impossible" (Chapter 54, p. 1036). He believes that life is founded on choice and accident. He feels driven that people can control their own destinies. However, this is a belief that Michael only truly embraces once Lasher steals Rowan and the baby from Michael. His actions in the novel never support the idea that he believes he is in control of his own future, even though he wants to believe it.

Though Michael fights the sense of predestination that seems to control his life, other characters embrace the choices in their lives. Julien tells Richard Llewellyn in a dream that nothing is predetermined. Mary Beth tells the priest that one strong person can change the future. She insists upon how important it is that we exercise our free will. Mary Beth also says that it is important to fight fate or fortune. Even Michael admits that the beings in his first vision give him a choice on whether he wants to accept their mission.



Carlotta wants Rowan to make a choice between embracing Lasher and witchcraft and fighting him. Aaron tells Rowan to make a moral choice when she decides what to do about Lasher. Rowan believes that she has a choice of how to handle her powers. She chooses to use it to save lives instead of to purposely kill people. However, she also chooses to run away with and study Lasher instead of killing him, as she has promised Michael and Aaron. Of course, when she makes that promise, she does not realize that it means she would have to kill her own child.

Sanctity of Human Life

Early in the novel, the reader learns that Michael ends a serious relationship with a woman because she wants to abort a child they accidentally conceive. He is so destroyed by her wanting to kill that potential person, that he values the child's life over his relationship with the woman. He vows not to ever have another lost child.

Rowan is sympathetic to Michael's beliefs about life beginning at conception and that abortion is killing an innocent potential person. She is horrified by Lemle's research. Although Lemle argues that the aborted fetuses are just wasted possibilities, and that his research can cure disease and save lives, Rowan runs from him, convinced that the research begins with killing. Rowan is also horrified by her ability to kill telekinetically. She feels there is no redemption for such ability. She refuses to kill for Lasher, which ironically is why she cannot destroy him.

Many other places in the novel explore our beliefs about human life, both during pregnancy and in adults. It is wrong when Lasher kills Petyr and the other Talamasca members or Mayfair family members who might interfere with his goal. Nancy and Rowan are both adopted, and Michael's own mother makes a poor marriage because of pregnancy and the social pressure at the time to have the baby in wedlock. Carlotta wants both Antha and Deirdre to have abortions rather than give birth to another witch to serve Lasher. Carlotta also seems to feel no regret for having killed Stuart Townsend. However, because Carlotta is such a disagreeable person, her death is seen as a blessing (by the reader and the Mayfair family), although Rowan still feels guilty about killing her. Aaron, Michael, and Rowan agree that they need to somehow destroy Lasher. However, Lasher is not human, and Aaron does not believe he ever could be human.

The Doorway

Lasher's purpose is to be reborn in a body that is better than human. He wants to retain the powers he has as a discarnate spiritual being, but he also wants to be able to see, laugh, eat, drink, and love. He has a prophesy about a doorway that will open between his world and the earthly world to help him obtain this goal. The witches pass this promise down from one generation to another, perhaps believing that once Lasher has passed through the doorway, others can as well. This is the salvation that the family rumors describe. Stella does not believe in the doorway until after the witches who



could help her understand (Julien and Mary Beth) have already died. She tries to open the doorway at her parties by gathering together thirteen witches at one time, but the experiment fails.

The promise of the doorway has a physical manifestation in the design of the house at First Street. Many of the old photos show the Mayfairs standing in the front doorway of the house. The Mayfair tomb has the same image. It includes twelve vaults and a doorway to represent that the thirteenth Mayfair would be the doorway. The chain of information ends with Mary Beth, however, so that Stella, Antha, and Deirdre do not know about true meaning of the doorway.

Michael learns the meaning of the doorway. He remembers the thirteen and the doorway from his original vision. When the family gossips about the old legends, Michael quickly surmises that Rowan is the doorway. Rowan represents the figurative doorway between the unseen world and the normal world. She is the doorway, not only because generations of selective inbreeding have made her very powerful, but also because of her knowledge as a doctor. She has both the scientific understanding of DNA and cells, as well as the telekinetic ability to transform matter, which Lasher needs to come through the doorway.

Style

Point of View

The *Witching Hour* uses mostly a third-person subjective point of view. The point of view used incorporates the thoughts and feelings of several different characters. Though the point of view switches every chapter or so, this form of narration is consistent and reliable. The third person subjective point of view provokes a sense of reality, which is important for the suspension of disbelief in a novel dealing with paranormal events or beings. The reader knows the thoughts and feelings of the character through whose eyes each chapter is narrated. However, the reader only knows about other character's thoughts and feelings by their dialogue and actions.

In the first part of the novel, very minor characters present an outsider's view of the Mayfair family. Dr. Petrie (Deirdre's doctor for a short while) and Father Mattingly (the Mayfair parish priest) present their impressions of the family living in the gloomy house and the specter that seems to haunt them. Deirdre's friend Rita Mae Lonigan presents a slightly more personal history of Deirdre's fate. Other than these three chapters, the first part of the novel switches between the two principal characters, Michael and Rowan.

In part two, Michael is reading the Talamasca history of the Mayfair family. The first chapters are presented as letters between Petyr van Abel and his Talamasca leader Stefan Franck, which provides an opportunity for some first person narration of the events involving Petyr. Aaron's narrative prefaces these letters to explain the translation. Aaron's narrative is presented in the third person objective point of view. Periodically, the Talamasca history is interjected with narration involving Michael as he reads the file. He writes his thoughts about his reading in a diary, but the sections focusing on Michael are a continuation of the third person subjective viewpoint initiated in the first part of the book. The remainder of the history is a continuation of Aaron's narrative of the evidence collected by the Talamasca. The evidence includes quite a bit of testimony from minor characters, providing more opportunity for some first person narration (as dialogue) for events those characters witnessed. Interspersed with Michael's reading of the history, there are a few chapters that keep up with Rowan as she goes to New Orleans and attends Deirdre's funeral. These chapters also continue to the third person subjective viewpoint from Rowan's point of view.

The remainder of the novel continues to switch between Michael and Rowan's third person subjective point of view. Lasher's thoughts and feelings are only ever presented in what he says to the witches, or what Michael experiences when he uses the power in his hands to witness past events.



Setting

The novel has multiple settings. Michael and Rowan both start in present-day San Francisco, the setting for Michael's rescue, which has occurred before the start of the novel. Michael is confined to his lovingly restored house on Liberty Street, but thinks about his childhood in New Orleans, especially the houses of the Garden District. Rowan moves between a house in Tiburon (outside San Francisco), left to her by her dead adoptive parents, her boat *The Sweet Christine*, and the hospital where she works as a neurosurgeon. The chapters narrated by the minor characters center on a gloomy mansion in the Garden District of New Orleans where few repairs have been made over the last sixty years because of an invisible fiend who pushes over ladders and knocks over paint cans. The swimming pool is a swamp and the garden is very overgrown. Michael is drawn to this house, and on the night he returns to New Orleans, he goes there, sees Lasher, but is rescued by Aaron.

Aaron takes Michael to the Talamasca Motherhouse in Oak Haven, about an hour's drive from New Orleans. Michael is attracted to the fine house and its furnishings. He has an easy time imagining himself as part of the Talamasca's world.

The Talamasca history follows the Mayfair family from its beginnings in Donnelaith, Scotland, where Suzanne is burned before Petyr arrives. Later members of the Mayfair family visit this village, which is nothing but ruins after Suzanne's death. Petyr takes Deborah to Amsterdam, where she lives for several years before marrying a second time and leaving for Montcleve, France. In France, Petyr catches up with Deborah again before her scheduled execution. These settings as part of the history of the Mayfairs are not fully realized, but provide enough details to attribute to their authenticity.

Petyr follows Charlotte to the May Faire plantation in Saint-Domingue (which today is known as Haiti). Enough details of the plantation house, the outbuilding where Petyr is kept prisoner, and the cemetery on the road from Port-au-Prince are presented to make these settings realistic. However, again, these settings are a minor part of the overall history. The Riverbend Plantation is not well-described, since the Talamasca collects very little information about the Mayfairs during that time period.

The antebellum mansion on First Street in Garden District of New Orleans is the primary setting for the remainder of the novel, although the characters (both present and historical) visit other locals around New Orleans and Metarie (where the Cortland branch of the family lives). In the third part of the novel, the house is completely renovated, as if it is foreshadowing Lasher's rebirth. The house that Michael and Rowan buy in Fort Walton, Florida is another minor setting where Rowan plans to boat, and where they spend their honeymoon.

A final setting is the vision of Hell that Michael sees when he drowns in the swimming pool. All of the Mayfair witches are there, as well as the nun's from Michael's childhood. The nuns make Michael believe (when he wakes) that Lasher creates the vision, based on images from Michael's own mind.



Language and Meaning

The language in the novel changes, based on the character viewpoint for the narration or the dialogue for the current character. This approach of using many different narrators and dialogue from many others helps to create a multi-layered story that is something like looking at an intricate tapestry. This effect helps to create a very believable world, which is important in stories involving paranormal events and beings. The more educated characters in the novel tend to use more sophisticated vocabulary, both in their dialogue and in any narration presented in their viewpoint. Other characters use word and phrasing choices that characterize them differently, such as Rita Mae Lonigan being more emotional. Other language choices also help with characterization, such as Julien speaking French at times.

The chapters Aaron narrates have a formal, scholarly language that mimics his dialogue in other sections of the novel. This language befits his British background, and the characterization of the Talamasca as a scholarly organization. He even summarizes the methods he uses in the translation of the older materials at the beginning of the Mayfair history. The language Petyr van Abel uses in the translated letters helps support the setting and time period of the events being related.

Michael is a character who grows up in the Irish Channel, but obtains a more refined life in San Francisco. His language is simple and straightforward. He does sometimes reveal his more humble origins in his word and phrase choices. Rowan is a sophisticated woman, and her narration, dialogue and thoughts support this. Her conversations with Lasher especially support her scientific view of the world. Finally, Lasher's word choices support his description that he only knows of himself through the witches he serves. He grows more sophisticated as the witches themselves grow more sophisticated. At times, his words make him seem very simple. However, later he knows more, and this shows in his language.

Structure

The novel includes many different viewpoints and many different family stories. By incorporating the same stories from different viewpoints, the novel creates a collage effect. This creates a rich, detailed view of the Mayfair family before the principal characters even know about the Mayfair family. Though in places the excessive detail and lengthy chapters tend to bog the reader down, many other chapters are so action-packed that the reading flies by quickly. There are also some very short chapters that keep the reader turning pages.

The novel is divided into four parts. The first five chapters present pieces of each main character's history and a broad view of the Mayfairs from the outsider's perspective. The first part is "Come Together," which aptly describes how the various characters' lives move along, gradually coming together. Some of these chapters are extremely long, especially the chapter presenting Michael's back story, which is over 50 pages. For the



remainder of Part One (through Chapter 13), Michael and Rowan begin their romance and their destiny to create a child together.

In Part Two, the story of the current time period continues intermittently, in which Michael is at the Talamasca Motherhouse, and Rowan is drawn to New Orleans and the secrets that have been kept from her. It also presents the epic Mayfair history. The structure of the history is over three hundred years of observation that the Talamasca collects about the Mayfair family. When Aaron gets involved with the file, he completes a translation and summary of the materials with the aim of presenting it to the Mayfair family to let them decide what to do with it. Chapters 13 through 16 are the letters between Petyr and the Talamasca, and although the chapters are long, some of them are broken up into multiple letters. Chapters 17-27 follow the family over the centuries from Petyr's death until the present. Though many of these chapters are also long, they are interspersed with brief chapters following Rowan's life. Chapters 28 through 32 return to present-day action in New Orleans.

Part Three is short. Ten chapters describe restoring the house and Michael and Rowan's plans to marry and live there. They become involved with the large Mayfair family. More of the mystery involving Lasher is revealed, especially in the last chapter, when the family talks about the pact and the thirteen witches. Part Four is twelve chapters, which mostly occur between Rowan and Lasher. Rowan questions Lasher, trying to understand what he expects of her. She is troubled by nightmares that foreshadow Lasher's birth. In the short Epilogue (two chapters), Michael recovers from drowning a second time, and a concurrent heart attack. He tries to make sense of what happens and waits for Rowan to return.



Quotes

"But the great accidental discovery was that Michael could absorb something more than stories from books...that they could lead him to something other than painful dreaming and wanting." (Chapter 2, p. 46).

"Not that we suffer guilt for what we do, for we believe it is morally right to control the birth of our young, but that we have uneasy dreams of all those little beings washed, unborn, into eternity? Or was it mere fear of the beings themselves who want to claim us - eternally free adolescents - and make us parents." (Chapter 2, p. 69).

"Once you've seen the man, you're done for." (Chapter 3, p. 77).

"It's a legacy of ignorance and jealousy and mental sickness!" (Chapter 3, p. 96)

"It was all a pattern, as surely as a spider web is a pattern, but a pattern does not imply a purpose. Patterns exist everywhere and purpose is at its safest when it is spontaneous and short-lived." (Chapter 4, p. 130-131).

"And now there was only the dampness here, the thick overhanging sky, and the strong knowledge that all the years of waiting were finished, that something for which he'd been prepared was about to begin." (Chapter 6, p. 173).

"I think of those deaths and the guilt is so terrible, I don't have a purpose or an idea or a plan. It stands between me and life." (Chapter 6, p. 196).

"His head was full of too many images from his past, and the sense of destiny that united these images was too strong for it to have come from some random reminder of his home through her." (Chapter 6, p. 200).

"Maybe she knew because she said, 'We're frightened of what makes us different.'" (chapter 6, p. 201).

"The fact is, for all we learn about ourselves, for all we codify and classify and define, the mysteries remain immense." (Chapter 6, p. 201).

"But they couldn't do things to people to hurt them, to manipulate them as if they were puppets on strings!" (Chapter 6, p. 213).

"And tantalizing though this was, it discouraged him suddenly, because the great design—of which he felt he was part—seemed for all its vagueness to be growing, and the bigger it grew, the more the world itself seemed to dwindle, to lose its splendor and its promise of infinite natural wonders and ever-shifting fortune, and even some of its ragged romance." (Chapter 9, p. 253).



"How curious it is that these religious people believe the devil to be so stupid that he should seek to corrupt only the poor and powerless—why not the king of France for once?—and the population at large to be so weak." (Chapter 13, p. 277).

"Ah, Stephan, give me a man or woman who has read a thousand books and you give me an interesting companion. Give me a man or woman who has read perhaps three and you give me a dangerous enemy indeed." (Chapter 13, p. 277).

"The cunning woman of the village becomes a witch only when her powers to heal do not work. Before that, she is everyone's good sorceress, and there is nary the slightest talk of devils." (Chapter 13, p. 280).

"This is always the mistake of the sorceress, you see, to imagine her power is complete over the unseen forces that do her bidding, when in fact, it is not. And what of her will, her conscience, and her ambition? How the thing does corrupt her! It is unnatural, Petyr, and dangerous, indeed." (Chapter 13, p. 308).

"Tell her to proceed with care—that he whom I have sent to obey her sometimes does those things for us which he believes we want him to do. And further tell her that he whom I am sending to her draws his belief in our purpose as much from our random thoughts as from the careful words we speak." (Chapter 13, p. 317).

"And though we in the Talamasca have long held that most of this is pure fancy, we know that there are such entities, and we know that the books contain some worthwhile warnings as to the danger inherent in evoking these beings, for they may grant our wishes in ways that cause us to cry to heaven in desperation as the old tale of King Midas and the peasant story of the three wishes make plain." (Chapter 14, p. 334).

"...I believe that the spirit has not only characteristics to be learned by the witch, but a character through which he learns; in sum, not only a nature to be understood, but a soul perhaps through which he understands." (Chapter 14, p. 334).

"But I speak not of that part of you but the private, secret part of you which might have known love and known passion and shrank from it for fear of it, disliking the very heat. You must realize that sin such as we have committed tonight can only strengthen us and cause us to grow more solitary and willful and cold towards others as if our secrets were shields." (Chapter 15, p. 374).

"I believe nothing, and therefore like many who believe nothing, I must make something, and that something is the meaning which I give to my life. The saving of witches, the study of the supernatural, these are my lasting pleasures; they make me forget that I do not know why we are born, or why we die, or why the world is here." (Chapter 15, p. 380).

"In most families,' Julien declared in French, 'when a person dies, all that the person knows dies with that person. Not so with the Mayfairs. Her blood is in us, and all she knew is passed into us and we are stronger.'" (Chapter 17, p. 429).



"I do not speak of retribution. I do not speak of revenge. I speak of illumination, understanding, and above all, resolution. I speak of the final light of truth." (Chapter 20, p. 544).

"Again the words "meant" and "planned" and driving me mad. Everything in me revolts against such an idea. I can believe in a mission, in a destiny, in a great purpose. All those words have to do with courage and heroism, with free will. But "meant" and "planned" fill me with this despair." (Chapter 27, p. 679).

"He'll take from your mind the answer best suited to lead you on, to enthrall you. He'll weave a web of deceits so thick you won't see the world through it. He wants your strength and he'll say what he must say to get it. Break the chain, child! You're the strongest of them all! Break the chain and he'll go back to hell for he has no other place to go in all the wide world to find strength like yours. Don't you see? He's created it." (Chapter 28, 698).

"The thing would come, and the thing would work its charm—like the devil and the old women of the village—and she would be expected to succumb, but she would not, and the power within her, nurtured through twelve witches, would be sufficient to destroy him. Thirteen is bad luck, you devil. And the door is the door to hell." (Chapter 39, p. 894).

"That man had only begun to realize the possibilities of the present science, that new beings might be created by means of transplants, grafts, in vitro experimentation with genes and cells. You saw the scope of the possibilities. Your mind was young, your imagination enormous; you were what men fear—the doctor with the vision of a poet. And you turned your back on your visions, Rowan. In the laboratory of Lemle, you could have created new beings from the parts of existent beings. You reached for brutal tools because you feared what you could do. You hid behind the surgical microscope and substituted for your power the crude micro tools of steel with which you severed tissues, rather than creating them. Even now you act from fear. You will build hospitals where people are to be cured, when you could create new beings, Rowan." (Chapter 42, p. 940).

"This is a struggle between the natural and the unnatural, Michael. No matter what that being is made of, no matter what he comes from—it's a struggle between normal life and aberration. Between evolution on the one hand and disastrous intervention on the other. And both have their mysteries and their miracles, and nobody knows that better than Rowan herself." (Chapter 48, p. 984).



Topics for Discussion

Aaron tells Rowan that she needs time to make a moral decision. How is her decision moral or immoral? What is the morality of Lasher's ambition to become immortal? Discuss Rowan's choice.

Discuss the role of women in this novel. In the historical chapters, how were strong women viewed? How do some of the women behave outside of normal society standards (in name, dress, etc.)? What are the consequences for their behavior? What about the weaker women characters? How do they handle the pressure to comply with human versus supernatural?

Lasher is omniscient, but is limited when working in time. Discuss his attributes, abilities and constraints. How does he use his powers to achieve his goal? How do his limitations affect his ambition?

Compare the characters that attribute Lasher's actions to ordinary events (such as children stealing flowers from the church altar) to characters that attribute Lasher's actions to supernatural events. How does an unwillingness to believe in the supernatural contribute to the novel's atmosphere?

For Michael, what is the difference between a mission and predestination? Why does he dislike the idea of predestination so much?

Compare Michael's feelings about the lost "Little Chris" from his previous relationship to Petyr's feelings about Charlotte. Does a father have any rights when a woman becomes pregnant by him? What are they?

Discuss the Talamasca. How is the organization like a religious organization? How is it different?