



## CHAPTER SEVEN

# The Leech<sup>1</sup> and his Patient

**U**nder the name of Roger Chillingworth was hidden another name, which Chillingworth had decided never to use. He was unknown to all, except to Hester, and he possessed the lock and key of her silence.


Roger Chillingworth set up his residence in the town of Boston, and he became the physician of the settlement. The townspeople considered themselves fortunate to have such a learned physician in their town. During the period of Indian captivity he had gained considerable knowledge of the medicinal

1. leech : (here) old English for doctor, but also a person who clings to another.

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properties of native herbs and roots.

Chillingworth had chosen Reverend Dimmesdale, who was greatly admired, as his spiritual guide. At about this time, Reverend Dimmesdale's health began to fail. The townspeople were very worried about this. He had become very thin and his cheeks were terribly pale. He often put his hand over his heart in sign of pain.

Therefore, the townspeople thought it was an absolute miracle that Dr. Chillingworth had come to cure their reverend. He became the reverend's medical adviser. Together, they took long walks in the forest and along the seashore. Both were learned, intelligent men and they were glad to exchange their ideas on different topics. Intellectually, it was a breath of fresh air for the reverend. 

Thus Roger Chillingworth, the kind and friendly physician, got to know his patient very well—too well. Chillingworth believed that the illnesses of the body are usually connected with the problems of the heart and mind.

A man burdened with a secret should avoid the intimate company of his physician because if the physician possesses intuition, sooner or later the secret will transpire. Chillingworth felt that Reverend Dimmesdale possessed a secret that he was carefully guarding.

After some time, upon a hint <sup>1</sup> from Roger Chillingworth, the friends of Reverend Dimmesdale arranged that the two should share the same house. In this way, every moment of the minister's life would pass under the investigating eye of his anxious physician.

1. hint : indirect suggestion.



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The townspeople were relieved because they felt that the reverend would finally be in good hands.

This new home was with a pious widow of good social rank. The kind widow gave the sickly <sup>1</sup> reverend a front apartment with a sunny exposure. On the other side of the house, old Chillingworth arranged his study and laboratory.

As time went on, a part of the community began to see the old physician as a mysterious figure. There was an aged craftsman who said he had seen the same physician in London about thirty years earlier.

Others said that Roger Chillingworth's aspect had undergone a remarkable change since he began living with Reverend Dimmesdale. At first, his expression had been calm, meditative and scholarly. Now there was something ugly and evil in his face that became more evident as the days passed. According to these people, the fire in his laboratory was fed with infernal fuel. Sometimes a blue, ghastly <sup>2</sup> light burned in his eyes.

To sum up the matter, a good majority of the townspeople believed that Reverend Dimmesdale, like many other holy people, was haunted either by Satan himself or by Satan's messenger, disguised as old Roger Chillingworth.

Throughout his life, old Chillingworth had been a calm, kindly individual. He had never been a warm person, but he was an upright <sup>3</sup> man. He had begun his investigation with the impartial integrity of a judge, but as time went on, he became

1. **sickly** : not healthy, weak.
2. **ghastly** [gə:stli] : causing great fear.
3. **upright** : honest, responsible.

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emotionally involved. He was seized by a terrible fascination that never again set him free. He became obsessed.



He dug incessantly into the poor clergyman's heart, like a miner searching for gold. He groped along as stealthily<sup>1</sup> as a thief. Reverend Dimmesdale, who was extremely sensitive, became aware that something inimical<sup>2</sup> had entered his life. He was suspicious of all mankind. He trusted no man as his friend, but he was not able to recognise his enemy when he actually appeared. Therefore, he continued being Chillingworth's close friend. Dimmesdale often visited the physician's laboratory and watched the processes by which weeds and roots were converted into potent medicines.

One day, while he was in the physician's laboratory, he asked, "Where did you find those weeds with such a dark leaf?"

"I found them growing on a grave that had no tombstone. These ugly weeds probably grew out of a dead man's heart—a heart that hid some hideous<sup>3</sup> secret that was buried with him; a secret that he should have confessed during his lifetime."

"Perhaps," said the reverend, "he earnestly wanted to but he could not."

"Why not?" asked Chillingworth, observing the reverend closely.

1. **stealthily** [stelθili] : secretly, quietly, cat-like.
2. **inimical** : hostile.
3. **hideous** : dreadful, grotesque, macabre.



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"The human heart hides our most hideous secrets, and it must do so until that Last Day. <sup>1</sup> Then, with immeasurable joy, all men will reveal their sins before the Heavenly Father. Only the Divine power can peer <sup>2</sup> into the heart to discover its secrets."

"But why not reveal them here? Why shouldn't the guilty ones get rid of <sup>3</sup> their burden and receive this immeasurable joy here on earth?"

"Most sinners do," said the reverend, gripping his breast. "Many, many a poor soul has confided in me, not only on the death-bed. And after such an outpouring, the sinner experienced immense relief."

"Yet some men bury their secrets," observed the calm physician.

"True, there are such men," answered the reverend.

"These men are afraid to take up the shame that belongs to them," said Chillingworth. "Such men deceive themselves!"

The physician continued examining the plants that he had gathered. Reverend Dimmesdale watched him and then said, "Do you think my health is improving with your remedies? Please speak frankly."

The physician was still busy with the plants, but kept a wary <sup>4</sup> eye on the reverend. "Your disorder is a strange one. Have you told me everything I need to know in order to cure you? Are you hiding anything from me?"

1. **Last Day** : Judgement Day, in religion, the day when God will judge all men.
2. **peer** : look very carefully.
3. **get rid of** : free oneself of something unpleasant.
4. **wary** [weəri] : attentive, suspicious, cautious.

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"How can you ask me this?" said the minister.

"To speak very plainly, I think your bodily disease is only a symptom of a spiritual ailment. <sup>1</sup> Please pardon me, sir, if my speech offends you."

"I presume you do not deal in medicine for the soul!" said the reverend, hastily rising from his chair.

Chillingworth went on in an unaltered tone, "If you want your physician to heal the evil of your body, you must first reveal to him the trouble in your soul."

"No! Not to you! Not to an earthly physician!" cried Reverend Dimmesdale passionately, with a kind of fierceness. "Not to you! If my soul is troubled, I will open myself to the Physician of the soul! Who are you to meddle <sup>2</sup> in this matter—to put yourself between the sufferer and his God?"

With a frantic gesture, he rushed out of the room.

"It is good that this has happened," said Chillingworth to himself. "Nothing is lost. We'll be friends again. But I have seen how passion takes hold of this man. As with one passion, so with another!"

After a few hours, the reverend apologised to his physician for his outburst. <sup>3</sup> He asked Chillingworth to continue curing his health. Chillingworth agreed and continued his medical supervision.

One day at noon, Reverend Dimmesdale fell asleep in his chair while reading a book. Old Chillingworth came into his

1. **ailment** : illness.

2. **meddle** : interfere.

3. **outburst** : sudden explosion of feeling.



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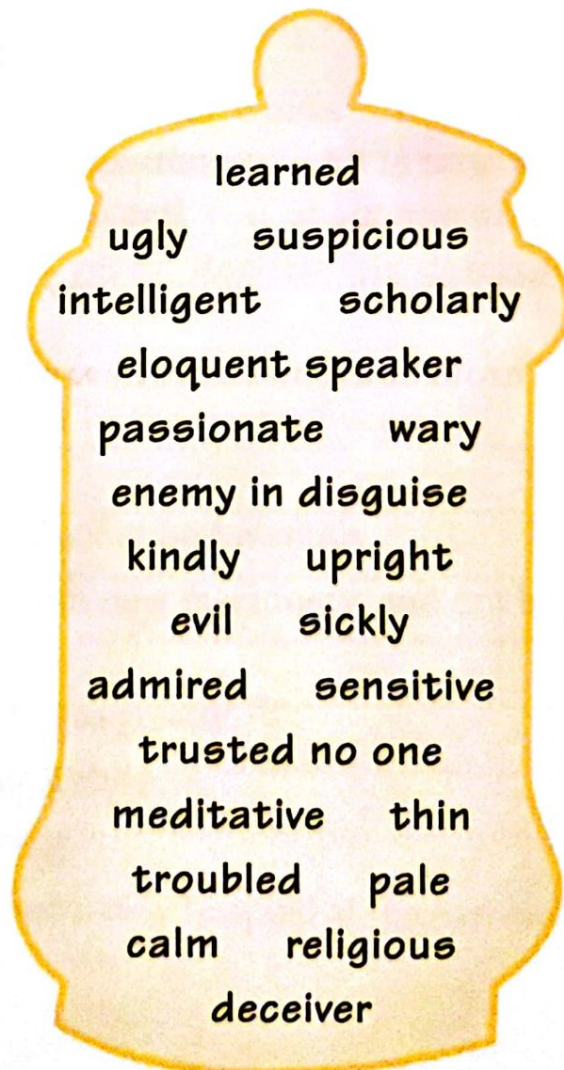
room, but did not awaken the reverend. He laid his hand on the reverend's chest and thrust aside the vestment that had always covered it. Dimmesdale continued sleeping.

After a moment, the physician turned away with a wild look of wonder, joy and horror! He threw up his arms and stamped his foot on the floor! He behaved like Satan himself when a soul is lost to heaven and won into his kingdom.



- 1**
- How did Roger Chillingworth enter into Reverend Dimmesdale's life?
  - Why was Roger Chillingworth so deeply interested in the clergyman's life and secrets?
  - How did Chillingworth's aspect change after he began living with the reverend?
  - Was Reverend Dimmesdale aware of an evil presence in his life?
  - What made the reverend explode in anger? How did Chillingworth react?
  - What made the physician throw up his arms and stamp his foot on the floor?

- 2**
- Choose the words in the jar that best describe Roger Chillingworth before and after he was seized by his terrible suspicions. Then choose the words that best describe Reverend Dimmesdale all through the story. Some words can be used more than once. Write 3 short paragraphs describing these characters.





Both men were ..... and .....

Before his terrible suspicions, Roger Chillingworth was:

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After his terrible suspicions, he became:

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Throughout the story, Reverend Dimmesdale is:

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