



CHAPTER EIGHT

The Interior of a Heart

After the incident last described, the relationship between the clergyman and the physician changed profoundly, although externally it seemed the same. Roger Chillingworth appeared calm, gentle and passionless, as always. But there was now a certain malice in this old man that led him to imagine a more intimate revenge than any mortal had ever inflicted on an enemy. Chillingworth saw and understood every movement of Dimmesdale's soul. He became the chief actor in the poor minister's interior world. He could manipulate the reverend as he chose because he knew the spring that controlled the engine.

The Interior of a Heart

All this was accomplished with perfect subtlety. Although the minister felt an evil influence watching over him, he could never suspect its real nature. At times he looked doubtfully, fearfully, and even with horror and hatred at the deformed physician. His entire being was odious to the minister.

Nevertheless as a matter of principle, the reverend continued his habits of social familiarity with the old physician. This gave Chillingworth a constant opportunity to perfect his revenge on his unsuspecting victim.

Reverend Dimmesdale suffered from ill health, was tormented by a troubled soul and was a victim of the machinations¹ of his worst enemy. In spite of all this, he achieved a brilliant popularity as a pastor. His intellectual gifts and his power of communicating emotion were kept alive by the anguish of his daily life.

It was the heavy burden he carried in his heart that enabled him to understand the sinners of his congregation so well. He was considered a miracle of holiness.

This public veneration tortured him! He longed to speak out from his own pulpit and tell the people what he really was: "I, your pastor, whom you venerate and trust, am a profanation and a lie!"

More than once, Reverend Dimmesdale had gone to the pulpit with the purpose of revealing his true self. More than once he had cleared his throat and had actually spoken! Spoken! But how?

1. **machinations** : plans for doing harm.

The Scarlet Letter

He told his congregation that he was completely vile and disgusting, the worst of sinners and unworthy¹ in every way. Wouldn't the people take him out of the pulpit? Not so! They appreciated him even more! "He is a saint on earth! If he sees sins in his own white soul, what a horrid spectacle if he ever saw mine!" they said among themselves.

The minister knew—subtle, but remorseful hypocrite that he was—how his vague confession would be viewed. He spoke the truth and transformed it into a falsehood. And yet he loved the truth and hated lies. Therefore, above all things, he hated his miserable self!

In the reverend's secret closet, under lock and key, there was a whip. His inner troubles led him to whip his own shoulders, while he laughed bitterly.

It was also his custom to fast.² He fasted as an act of penance, until his knees trembled. At night, instead of sleeping, he kept vigils.³ During these long vigils, he studied himself in the mirror. He had visions of angels, of demons, of dead friends of his youth, of his parents. He also had visions of Hester with little Pearl in her scarlet dress, pointing to her



1. **unworthy** : contemptible, inferior.
2. **to fast** : eat no food for a certain period of time.
3. **vigils** : staying awake during the night.

mother's scarlet letter and then to the minister's own breast. Reverend Dimmesdale lived a life of misery, a life of falsehood. The only truth that continued to give him a real existence on earth was the anguish¹ of his soul.

On one of those ugly nights, a new thought came to his mind. He dressed with care, went down the staircase quietly, opened the door and went out.

Walking in the shadow of a dream, Reverend Dimmesdale reached the platform where seven years before Hester Prynne had lived through her first hour of public ignominy.

It was a cloudy night in early May. The town was asleep. Why had the minister come here? He had been driven by the impulses of Remorse and Cowardice:² Remorse pushed him to confession, while Cowardice pulled him back with her tremulous grip.

While standing on the scaffold in this vain show of expiation, the reverend was overcome by a horrible feeling—it was as if the universe was gazing at a scarlet token on his naked breast, right over his heart.

Without realizing it, he shrieked³ aloud! It was a cry that went ringing through the night.

"It is done," he muttered, covering his face with his hands. "The whole town will awaken and find me here!". But the town did not awaken.

Suddenly, in the dark of the night, he heard a light,

1. **anguish** : agony, anxiety, torment.

2. **Cowardice** : lack of courage.

3. **shrieked** [ʃri:kt] : gave a wild, painful cry.

childish laugh—he recognised little Pearl's voice.

"Pearl! Little Pearl!" he cried. Then, with a softer voice, he said, "Hester! Hester Prynne! Are you there?"

"Yes, it is Hester Prynne," she replied, approaching the platform.

"Where are you coming from?" asked the minister.

"I have been at Governor Winthrop's ¹ deathbed to take the measurements for his deathrobe."

"Come up here, Hester, you and little Pearl," said the minister. "You both have been here before, but I was not with you. Let us stand all three together."

She ascended the steps hesitantly, and stood on the platform, holding Pearl by the hand. The minister took the child's other hand. The moment that he did so, a rush of new life poured into his heart and rushed through his veins. It was as if the mother and child were communicating their vital warmth to his half-torpid system. The three formed an electric chain.

Suddenly, a bright light lit up the cloudy sky. It was undoubtedly a meteor flying through the sky.

In those days it was common to interpret the appearance of meteors as revelations from a supernatural source. As



1. Gov. Winthrop : the founder of the Puritan town of Boston; see page 29.

Reverend Dimmesdale looked up at the sky that had been lit by the meteor, he saw an immense letter A—marked with lines of dull red light.

While the reverend was gazing up at the sky, he was perfectly aware that little Pearl was pointing her finger at old Roger Chillingworth, who stood not far from the scaffold.

“Who is that man, Hester?” gasped ¹ the reverend, filled with terror. “Do you know this man? I hate him, Hester!”

She remembered her oath ² and was silent.

“My soul shivers at the sight of that man. He fills me with horror. Who is he?” muttered the reverend again.

Approaching the platform with a malevolent expression, Chillingworth said, “Pious Master Dimmesdale, can this be you? We men of study dream in our working moments, and walk in our sleep. Come, my dear friend, let me lead you home.”

“How did you know I was here?” asked the reverend.

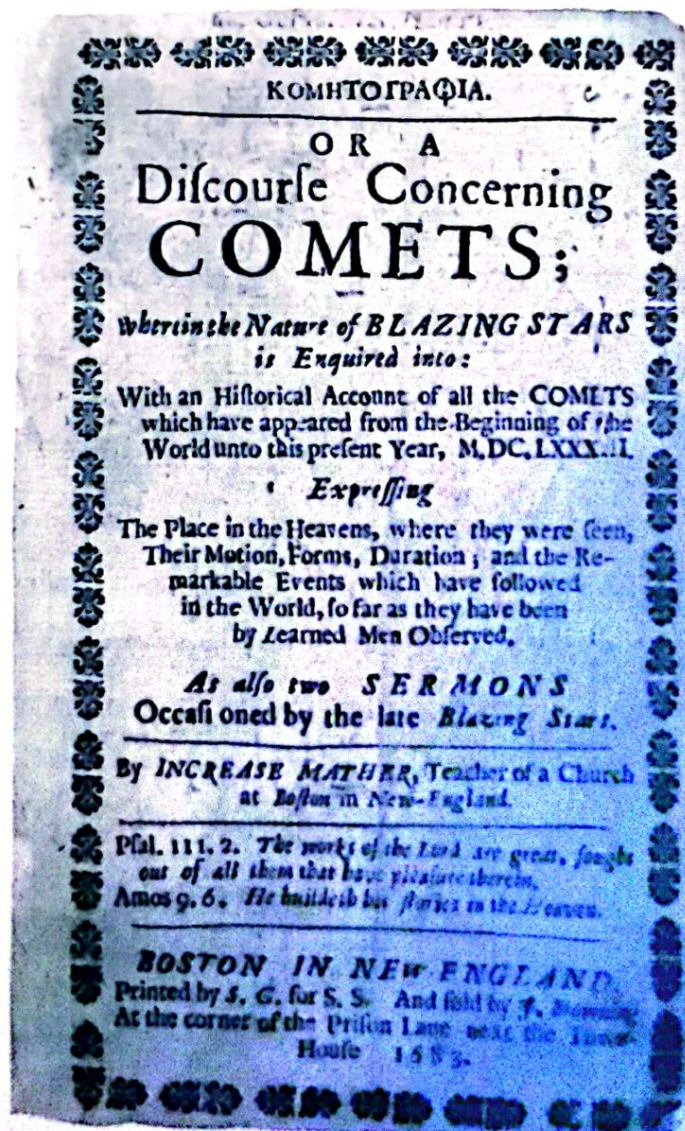
“I have spent most of the night at the deathbed of Governor Winthrop, trying to ease his suffering. Come with me, Reverend, we must go home now,” said Chillingworth. “Tomorrow is the Sabbath!”

The next day was the Sabbath and Reverend Dimmesdale preached his most powerful sermon. It was the richest and most complete that he had ever addressed to his devoted congregation.

1. **gasped** : took a short quick breath because he was shocked.

2. **oath** : solemn promise.

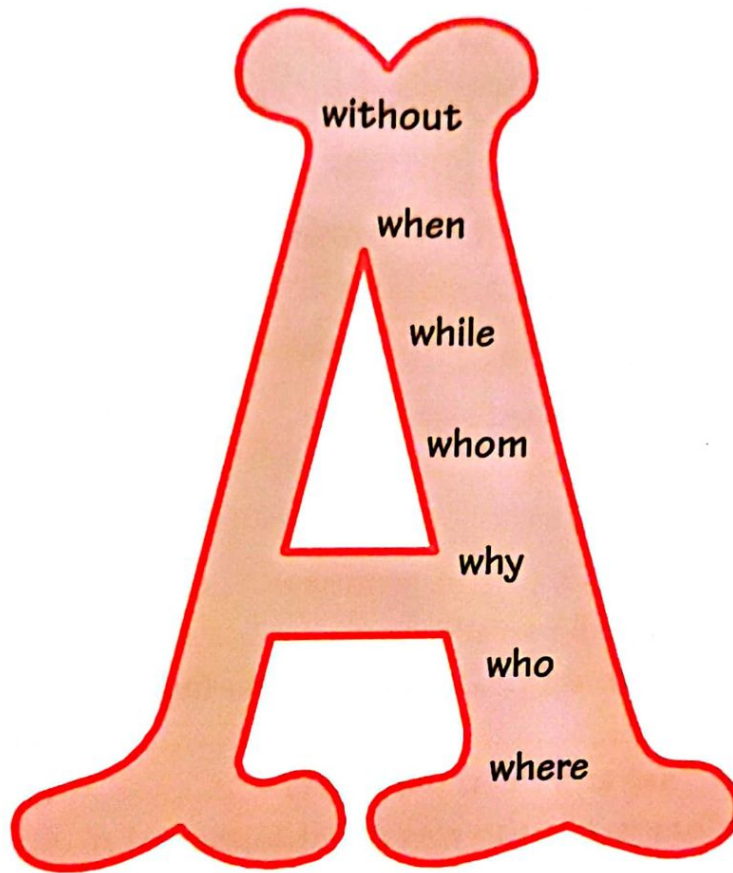
- How did the relationship between the clergyman and the physician change?
- Why was Reverend Dimmesdale so successful as a pastor?
- How did Reverend Dimmesdale "reveal" his true self to his congregation?
- Why did the minister go to the platform one night?
- Describe his meeting with Hester and Pearl.
- What did the reverend say to Hester about Chillingworth?



Bostonians were interested in the stars and astronomy.
Increase Mather wrote an essay entitled, "Discourse Concerning Comets".

“W” words

2 Choose the correct word from the “A” and fill in the blanks.



- are you coming from?
- standing on the scaffold, the reverend was overcome by a horrible feeling.
- had the minister come here?
- is he?
- realizing it, he shrieked aloud!
- I, your pastor, you venerate and trust, am a profanation and a lie!
- did Hester visit Governor Winthrop's deathbed?

Summary

- 3 Read the following summary of Chapters 5-8 and fill in the gaps choosing from the words given in the box.

shame side adviser soul free away
hiding Puritan interrupted
realized convince secret (x2) living sin
over child taking God's isolated
meeting (x2) alone stay lived
transformation contact

When Hester Prynne's prison term was ¹, she
² that she would be ³ in the world with her
⁴ She was ⁵ to leave Boston, but she
decided to ⁶ The ⁷ community
⁸ her and Pearl. Her only ⁹ with society
was through her work; she was considered a ¹⁰ by the
townspeople.

Governor Bellingham seriously thought about ¹¹ Pearl
¹² from Hester. At a ¹³ with the governor,
Reverend Dimmesdale was able to ¹⁴ him to let Hester
keep her ¹⁵, since this was ¹⁶ wish.

Roger Chillingworth became Reverend Dimmesdale's medical
¹⁷, and never left his ¹⁸ The minister and
the physician even ¹⁹ together. As time went on,
Chillingworth underwent a hideous ²⁰ He was
convinced that the reverend was ²¹ a terrible
²² The reverend had a troubled ²³, but
never revealed his ²⁴ to anyone. One night he had a
significant ²⁵ with Hester and Pearl, which was
²⁶ by Chillingworth.

Themes for thought, discussion and writing

A character analysis: Roger Chillingworth

At this point in the story, the personalities of the main protagonists are taking shape. We can see that Roger Chillingworth was a calm, kindly, upright man – a scholar, physician and scientist – who became a victim of his own obsession. This obsession, that Hawthorne calls his “terrible fascination”, transformed him. He became evil, ugly, satanic in his ways. His “investigation” had become the only purpose of his life.

Obsessions are often self-obsessions, and therefore obsession and egoism are almost the same thing.

Obsession is just a step away from insanity.¹ A person who is obsessed is removed from reality; a person who is insane is completely isolated from reality.

- 4** How would you explain this? Give examples.
- 5** Which famous people in history or in literature had a particular obsession?
- 6** Did this obsession transform their personality? Did they become insane?

1. insanity : madness.