

READING GUIDE ~
ALCHEMY OF HER HEART
CAROL ANN MOORE

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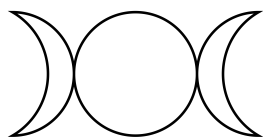
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WELCOME TO ALCHEMY OF HER HEART



WELCOME TO THIS CHARACTER compendium and reading guide to *Alchemy of her Heart*.

This is the third book in the series about the magical life of Aella Saluagius, following on from *The Coven of Cagliari*.

Aella left Italy and the women of her coven at the end of the book and travelled to England. The witch hunts that plagued this island lasted from the 15th to the 18th century. Women and some men, murdered by religious fanatics.

We meet Aella again in 1664 in the south of England. The austere era of the Puritans had finally come to an end with the restoration of Charles II on his throne.

Early experimentation in laboratories discovered many of the forerunners of science as we know it today. The golden age of the alchemist had arrived!

An overriding theme of the book is the medicine made from the flora and herbs people had access to. Apothecaries were busy brewing and decocting potions from what they grew in their own gardens. Obviously women were forbidden to train as apothecaries but if they were the widow of one, they could continue in the business, how generous of the Guild to allow them to earn a living. The only caveat in this was they had to employ an apprentice; a young man.

The women persecuted for being witches were more often than not healers. The wealth of ancient knowledge that was wiped out by the burning fanatics likely caused the deaths of many more people.

Herbs and plants are steeped in witchcraft and when the scientific, educated men could not or would not accept this, they victimised those that held that knowledge.

Myths and tradition are intermingled with magic and medicine and so each character in this book has their own affinity with a plant, its properties and its folklore.

If you're ready, let's dive into the bewigged, powdered and mystical 17th century.

AELLA SALUAGIUS



THE YEARS THAT HAVE spanned Cagliasaro and the present have given Aella a great deal of experience of the world. She left Italy, a girl, albeit a powerful one. Now she has reaped the knowledge of many lifetimes. Cruelty towards women has not decreased, it has just changed and so her task will continue.

The witch hunts have abated. She finds herself at somewhat of a loose end and homesickness plucks at her heartstrings.

Then, on a poster for a travelling faire, the mysterious Italian word, Pulcinella catches her eye. Where will this path lead her?

The flower Heartsease (Viola Tricolour) represents Aella in this part of her life. According to myth, the Egyptians believed it originated from the tears of Isis. A Greek legend has it that the delicate white flowers were worshipped by Eros. According to Roman mythology, the wild pansy turned into the Love-in-idleness as Cupid shot one of his arrows at a monk, but missed and struck the flower.



As Cupid is the god of desire, affection and erotic love, the flower's juice received the trait of acting as a love potion, and the flower, which was milk white, turned 'purple with love's wound'. Shakespeare also makes a more direct reference to heartsease in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* when Oberon sends Puck to gather 'a little western flower that maidens call love-in-idleness'.

That pesky Cupid, he gets everywhere.

"She mustered the courage to look at him. By the goddess; he looked as though he had been wrought by Venus herself. She had thought his hair was black, like hers, but it was not. Copper, bronze, and deepest red wove through the dark brown waves. He fixed his gaze on her and she could not have described the colour of his eyes if her life depended on it. They had pulled her in and she was having to concentrate hard on breathing." Aella Saluagius.

PIETRO GRIMANI



THE PATRIARCH OF THE Grimanis and a renowned showman. Hailing from a small town near Bologna, Italy, he has taken his marionette show and his family across Europe. The faire they are travelling with is currently in England, making its way to the capital, where the promise of fame awaits them.

I have chosen the Elm tree to symbolise Pietro. He is wise and kind, he loves his family and is a fair and compassionate man.

The elm tree has long been associated with protection and shelter. Its broad, arching branches and dense canopy offer shade and refuge from the elements. Ancient folklore held that the elm possessed the power to shield against lightning strikes and repel evil spirits. The tree's ability to provide sanctuary and safeguarding symbolises its role as a guardian and source of comfort. The elm tree has been regarded as a symbol of wisdom and intuition. In Celtic mythology, the elm was associated with the god Lugh, renowned for his intelligence and skill. The tree's fine-grained wood was highly valued by craftsmen, reinforcing its connection to wisdom and craftsmanship.

In medicinal use in Italy and the south of France, galls, sometimes the size of a fist, are frequently produced on the leaves. They contain a clear water called eau d'orme, which is sweet and viscid, and has been recommended to wash wounds, contusions and sore eyes. Culpepper, the famous botanist, herbalist, physician and astrologer, tells us:

'the water that is found in the bladders on the leaves of the elm-tree is very effectual to cleanse the skin and make it fair.'



“An old man, his back to her, was stooping down to pick up a cloth cap that had a generous pile of coins in it. As he straightened, he winced at the stiffness in his bones. There was a long clay pipe clamped between his teeth, and he wore a red waistcoat embroidered with many flowers and intricate patterns. He tipped the contents of the cap into a leather pouch tied to his breeches.” Pietro Grimani.

LETTA GRIMANI



LETTA GRIMANI IS A down to earth maternal pillar of strength for her family. She is fiercely proud of Pietro and her children and adores them. This adoration, however, does not put up with any misbehaviour or disrespect. She is bound in traditional values and is practical, quick-witted and kind.

With her protective streak, I thought the Alder tree was the perfect representation for Letta.

The Alder tree, with its roots entrenched in ancient soils and branches intertwined with the lore of old, occupies a place of reverence and mystique in the tapestry of history and mythology. This tree, known for its resilience and versatility, has been a symbol of significant spiritual importance across various cultures, particularly within Celtic mythology, where it is imbued with profound symbolic meanings. The indigenous peoples of the British Isles also recognised the Alder's protective essence. They fashioned shields and protective talismans from its wood, trusting in its ability to safeguard against harm and evil influences. The practice of using Alder wood in the construction of defensive tools and charms speaks to a widespread belief in the tree's inherent strength and its capacity to repel malevolent forces. In the Alder, we find a symbol of resilience. It stands as a reminder of the balance between strength and flexibility, teaching that true power lies in the ability to adapt and thrive amidst the ever-changing landscapes of life.



Medicinally, the bark is noted for its astringent and alterative effects. Externally, the bark can be decocted and used on a wide range of skin complaints. The leaves can be taken to soothe a sore throat.

‘Letta stared at Aella and seemed to make up her mind, her face softening. Her smile revealed Magdalena had inherited not only her mother’s curious nature, but other traits as well. Dimples appeared on her cheeks and her eyes creased at the corners. “Come, meet the others and eat with us. Maybe we can help you.” Letta Grimani.

MASO GRIMANI



THE ELDEST SON OF the Grimani family. Maso is in his late 20s and is an acrobatic performer in the family business. He is ambitious, striving to better his life chances, not content with remaining part of a travelling show for the rest of his days. Despite being born into a class that ordinarily had little chance of social mobility, Maso has other plans and he will leave no one behind. An opportunist that grasps life and all it offers.

Oh, did I mention he is drop dead gorgeous?

With that in mind, the plant for Maso has to be Myrtle.

Myrtle is a direct descendent of the Greek myrtos, the herb of love. In Greek mythology myrtle was sacred to the goddess Aphrodite, who is associated with love, beauty and pleasure and the planet Venus.

Similar to the Greeks association of myrtle with Aphrodite, the Romans dedicated it to the goddess Venus and myrtle was planted all around her temples.

It remains today a symbol of love and loyalty. For centuries, fragrant sprigs of Myrtle have been included in a wedding bouquet to symbolise the bride's love and beauty. It is still a popular European custom.

Myrtle leaves were used in ancient times to arrest and reduce the risk of urinary tract or kidney issues. It can help to stimulate urination, eliminating excess toxins, salts, fluids, and even fat, helping to regulate the functions of your kidneys.

“You are my Queen and you should always be in a palace. I do not intend to live my life in a wagon, and I want you to be with me in everything that I do.” Maso Grimani.



AURELIA GRIMANI



THE ELDEST DAUGHTER OF the Grimani family and the resident rope-walker of the show. Reportedly, tightrope walkers put on spontaneous performances high above the streets of Rome and even in the Coliseum. The Romans called these artists funambula, and today funambulist is the technical term for wire walkers, tightrope walkers and slack-liners.

She's in her late teens and has all the effervescence of youth. Aurelia has a decent amount of sass as well, although her mother doesn't put up with any of it. She's naïve about the outside world; the family protection of always being together has given her little experience of society.

For Aurelia, the wild plant, marjoram is perfect. This pungent ancient herb, a favourite of Aphrodite who grew it on Mount Olympus, has been associated with both love and love potions, but also protection from unwanted attention. In the past, it adorned the ceremonial crowns of the bride and groom during weddings, as well as playing a role in love and protection spells. Legend has it that if a woman desired to find her true love, she could place marjoram in her bed or anoint herself with it before sleeping, and Aphrodite would appear in her dreams and reveal the identity of her future husband.



Used for its healing and therapeutic properties for thousands of years, Marjoram was used by the ancient Greeks and Egyptians to help with shock and grief. In mediaeval times, it was commonly combined with Thyme to create a spiritually cleansing incense to drive sadness out of the home, particularly if a resident had just passed.

“With confident ease, she positioned her slippered foot onto the rope and walked gracefully along its length, as though she was going out for an evening stroll. The younger girl passed up a long slender pole, which the elder used for balance. She completed one length of the rope and the audience whistled its approval and roared for more. Her flowing dress of sea green georgette made her look like an exotic butterfly and she ventured out into the centre of the rope.” Aurelia

Grimani.

MAGDALENA GRIMANI



THE FAMILY'S YOUNGEST DAUGHTER, not yet in her teens. Magda, as they call her, is desperate to star in the show. Currently, she hands out props and collects the money in her father's hat from the amazed audience. The dimples in her cheeks and the freckles spattered across her nose surely help on the cuteness scale.

Always into mischief, with her curly hair in a constant bird's nest of disarray, she is the well-loved baby of the family.

The beautiful Foxglove is the flower that I have chosen for Magda. It has long been associated with fairies, and Magda is undeniably a sprite!

The name derives from the shape of the flowers resembling the fingers of a glove - 'folk's glove' meaning belonging to the fairy folk. Folklore tells that wicked fairies gave the flowers to the fox to put on his feet to soften his steps whilst hunting. In Irish folklore, it was said that if a child was wasting away, then it was under the influence of the fairies (fairy stroke) and foxglove was given to counteract this (it was known to revive people). One such remedy was the juice of twelve leaves taken daily. It could also work for adults. Such a person would be given a drink made from the leaves. If they were not too far gone, they would drink it and get sick, but then recover. However, if they were completely under the spell of the faeries, then they would refuse to drink.

Although I wouldn't recommend this as the whole foxglove plant is extremely poisonous, it provides a source of digitalis used by doctors in heart medicine. The foxglove was believed to keep evil at bay if grown in the garden, but it was considered unlucky to bring the blooms inside. An amulet of foxglove could also cure the urge to keep travelling that resulted when you stepped onto the fairy grass, the 'stray sod' or fód seachrán. In Ireland, it is believed that the foxglove will nod its head if one of the 'gentry' passes by.



“Magdalena was climbing the ladder to the tightrope. She reached the top and looked out at the sea of faces; many looking anxious; she was just a little girl. Beaming at them, brim full of confidence, she secured her hair with a barrette and walked, on her hands, the entire length of it. The room was silent, holding its collective breath. As she neared the far end of the apparatus, she took a fearless dive into the arms of her brothers.” Magdalena Grimani.

ANTONIO GRIMANI



THE SECOND ELDEST, AND middle brother of the Grimani family. He works with Maso in the show, their acrobatic skills bouncing off of each other.

Antonio is a sure and steady young man in his early twenties. He works hard and is the placater of any familial disputes.

The steadfast and sturdy Oak tree is the perfect representation of Antonio.

Throughout the major cultures of Europe, people have held the oak tree in high esteem. To the Greeks, Romans, Celts, Slavs and Teutonic tribes, the oak was foremost amongst venerated trees. In each case associated with the supreme god in their pantheon, oak being sacred to Zeus, Jupiter, Dagda, Perun and Thor, respectively. Each of these gods also had dominion over rain, thunder and lightning. It is no coincidence that oak trees are more prone to lightning strikes than many other trees. This is because of the tree's high water content and the fact that they are frequently the tallest living things in the landscape.



The Druids often worshipped and practised their rites in oak groves. The word Druid may derive from a Celtic word meaning “knower of the oak tree”.

After the battle of Worcester in 1651, King Charles II hid from the Roundheads in a large oak at Boscobel. In 1660, he instigated the 29th of May as Royal Oak Day to celebrate the restoration of the monarchy.

All parts of the oak – wood, bark, leaves, acorns and gallnuts – have traditionally been used in medicine since ancient times. The tree was valued for its astringent properties, most likely due to the high content of tannins. It was used for wide-ranging ailments from mouth disease and skin complaints to rheumatism and digestive problems.

“And now, emerging from the damp soil under the cold frames that Antonio had built for her, were the seedlings that would bloom with the coming summer heat. Lemon balm for digestion and to expel melancholy, feverfew to lower the temperature, valerian for sleep and hyssop for coughs, and of course, the white poppy, with its potent sap.” Antonio Grimani.

PIPPO GRIMANI



THE YOUNGEST SON OF the family, mid-teens and more than eager to join in with the acrobatic splendour of the show. His role, when we meet him in the novel, is one of musician. He plays the pipe and tabor. Pippo is a mischievous, annoying brother, especially to his sisters. Always ravenously hungry, he is endeavouring to eat his parents out of wagon and home.

The very common and much maligned Nettle is the plant that represents Pippo. He has an annoying sting for his siblings, but it causes no lasting harm.

Nettles have an old association with lightning, and with serpents. Legends say that the Great Serpent Lightning gave the plant some of his sting, while others speak of the Underworld Serpent giving the plant some of his poison. The Romani have folklore that states the nettle grows in places where there are underground passages to places where Earth faeries dwell.

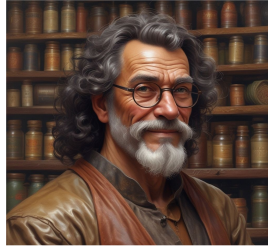
Both the Norse and Saxons considered the nettle as a plant of one of the nine worlds, Muspelheim, which was a burning hot place filled with lava, flames, sparks and soot. It was known as the “Realm of Fire”, which gave birth to the Sun and the stars, a world of fire and giants. From this we have a small piece of surviving Saxon folklore which says that casting fresh nettles into the hearth of a fire in a home will help keep away evil, bad luck or danger for those living in the household for the coming days. Another similar piece of folklore says that rolled up and dried nettle leaves thrown into a fire send curses back to the sender.

Tea made from the leaves has been used to treat hay fever, diabetes, gout and arthritis, and fresh stinging leaves are sometimes applied to arthritic joints in a process known as urtification, which is said to stimulate blood flow.

'Pippo grabbed his brother's arm, excitement dancing in his eyes. "You have got to see this, Antonio!" He pulled him closer to the front of the crowd.' Pippo Grimani.



AMBROSE ADAMS



AMBROSE ADAMS IS OUR apothecary of the story. A studious, compassionate man who wants nothing more than to cure people of their ailments. He's a widowed academic who, left to his own devices, would almost certainly forget to eat. Luckily his daughter makes sure he sups enough to keep him going.

He has a thriving business, healing the inhabitants of the City of London, but he is also the appointed apothecary to Lady Cecily Rutledge, as well as King Charles and Queen Catherine.

The status of his position to the monarchy does not define him, however; at his core, Ambrose is a down to earth and conscientious man.

For these reasons, the mighty Ash is the tree for Ambrose. In Scandinavian mythology, the ash tree was known as Yggdrasil, the 'Tree of the World' as the giant ash tree that linked and sheltered all the worlds. It was also known as 'The Tree of Rebirth and Healing' and to come into contact with it meant regeneration or rebirth. In British folklore, the ash was credited with a range of protective and healing properties.



Most of these were related to child health. New-born babies were popularly given a teaspoon of ash sap. Ailing children, especially those suffering with rupture or weak limbs, would be passed naked through a cleft in an ash tree or ash sapling, to cure them. The cleft was often made for the purpose and bound together again after the ceremony to heal over, as the child also healed. Some folklore then suggested an intimate bond between the welfare and fate of the tree and person. Harm to the tree was reflected in the healed person's life, leading people to become understandably protective of 'their' ash tree.

"Ambrose Adams had a stern, serious face. Brown wavy hair, the same shade as his jerkin, a bulbous nose and expressively bushy eyebrows. His fingers were long and slender and Aella saw they were stained with ink." Ambrose Adams.

LADY CECILY RUTLIDGE



CECILY RUTLIDGE IS THE daughter of the Earl of Robinham. She is in her late teens a timid, naïve girl who suffers from a mystery illness that no one can fathom.

Of course, she should be married to a fine young man by now, but her health has kept her from the social circuit.

An only child, ignored by her mother and spoiled by her father, her life is lonely and bleak, despite being surrounded by servants and wealth.

The gorgeous Lavender is perfect for Cecily. The flowers represent purity, silence, devotion, serenity, grace and calmness. Its mystical properties include mixing it with mugwort, chamomile and rose to attract fairies or elves on Midsummer's Eve. Or use it as a tea to increase your clairvoyance. Hanging a cross of lavender over the door stopped evil from coming into the home and one old belief said that inhaling lavender scent gave you the power to see ghosts.



Lavender is derived from lavare, the Latin for to wash. The purple-clad French herb's medicinal value was discovered in the 12th century. It was used to treat head lice. The active ingredient here is the oil in lavender flowers. A true miracle oil; French perfume-makers in the 13th century rarely caught the plague or cholera. This is because lavender oil acts as an antibacterial and an antiviral. It reduces inflammation in the throat and nose, calms the nerves and supports the skin's healing processes. The herb's powerful fragrances flow through the respiratory passages to the smell sensors in the brain where they have a calming

effect on the psyche. The possible applications are almost endless.

'Cecily's blue eyes swum with sorrow. "Yes, of course! I want to have a husband and god-willing children, but I am often in terrible pain and then my mind becomes confused and I have such dark thoughts. Please, I do not wish to talk about them.'" Cecily Rutledge.

THE EARL OF ROBINHAM ~ ISAAC RUTLIDGE



ISAAC RUTLIDGE, ONE OF the King's Merry Gang and a close childhood friend of Charles II. His family lineage goes back centuries, and he is almost as rich as the monarch himself.

The Restoration era is a splendid one to be inhabiting, especially if you're absurdly wealthy; Isaac makes the most of what is on offer.

Exceptionally soft-hearted towards his daughter but ruthless in other areas of his life, Isaac is a paradox amongst the bewigged court of King Charles.

It is for this reason that the Elder tree is a perfect representation of his personality.

The folklore surrounding elder is wide and often conflicting. It was thought that if you burned elder wood, you would see the devil, but if you planted one by your house, it would keep the devil at bay. Apparently, it could charm away warts and vermin. In Denmark, the tree was associated with magic. A dryad called the Elder Tree Mother was supposed to live in its branches. If you wanted to cut the tree to make furniture from its wood, the Elder Tree Mother must be asked permission first. If she wasn't, you ran the risk

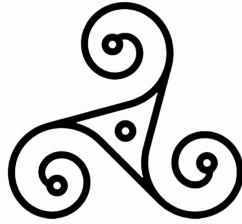
that she'd follow and haunt you. Elder's habit of growing on wasteland, rubbish tips and cemeteries has earned it both respect and dislike. So you see, it's much like Isaac himself.

The elder is a medicine cabinet in its own right. It provides a wealth of remedies throughout its yearly cycle. The leaves are some of the first of the trees to appear after winter and are used in ointments for bruising, sore muscles and chilblains. In the spring, the elder supplies us with its flowers, which are used for their anti-inflammatory and anti-allergy effects, specifically working on the upper respiratory tract and sinuses. In the autumn, we are rewarded with the beautiful purple-black berries. They work as a great antiviral, helping protect the whole family from colds and flu in the winter months. It's no coincidence that this plant offers us the actions we need most seasonally. It's nature's way of keeping us healthy.



“Isaac Rutledge appeared as though his lifetime of debauchery and indolence had caught up with him as he slumped in Ambrose’s chair. He had not needed to powder his face to achieve the pale complexion so fashionable, although, Aella thought, it may have concealed his sickly yellow pallor if he had. Rheumy eyes were bloodshot with lack of sleep and too much indulgence ringed the hazel irises. Even his wig was limp and despondent.” Isaac Rutledge.

FINAL WORDS



AS I WRITE THIS, *Alchemy of her Heart* is still awaiting publication. I hope that this character guide has whetted your appetite for the new book in the series.

There are more characters in the story but not ones I can reveal without spoilers, so you'll just have to download or buy a physical copy to find out.

Come and join the ever-growing coven of readers, we would love to have you!

You can follow me on all the usual social media platforms:

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/carolannmooreauthor>

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Also, check out my website for news, blogs and a monthly newsletter from Coven Headquarters.

The other books in the series are:

Sisterhood

The Coven of Cagliasaro