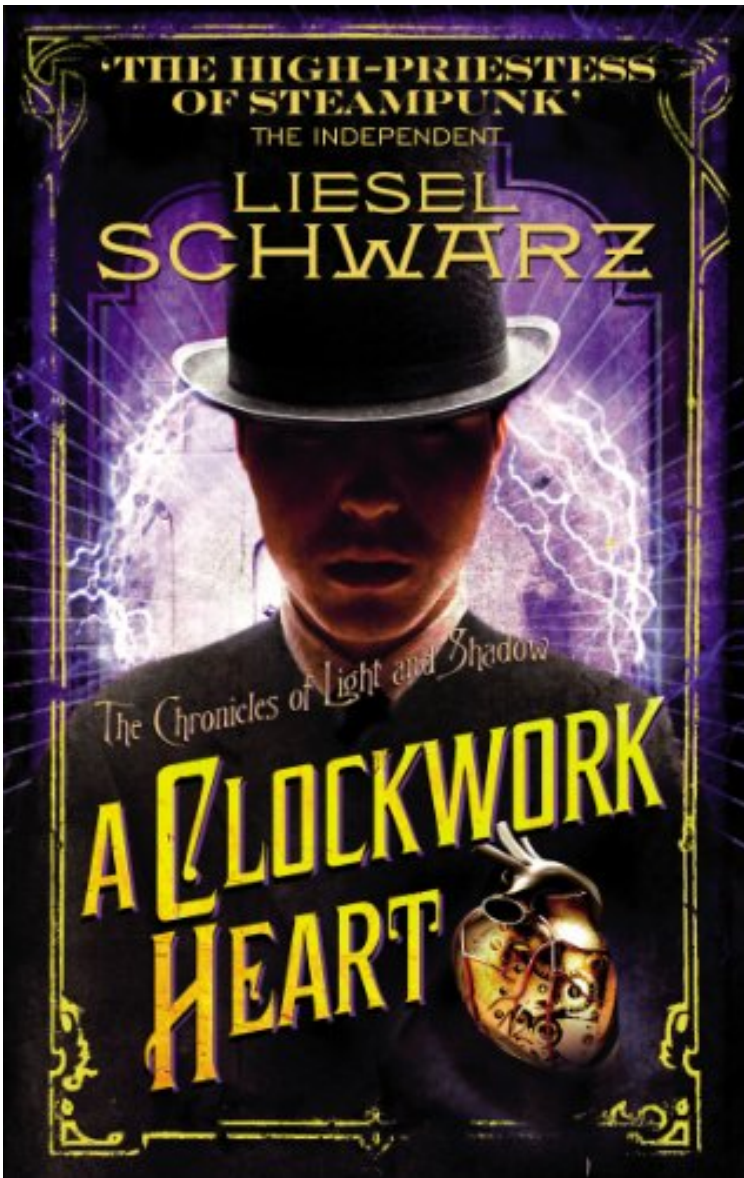


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A Clockwork Heart: Chronicles of Light and Shadow



Par Liesel Schwarz
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurThe honeymoon is over...A plague of clockwork zombies is afflicting London, and as more people mysteriously disappear, so grows the panic.For Eleanor Chance, she is still figuring out her abilities as the oracle, and how to keep the dark designs of the Shadow realm at bay.But then Marsh, her newly-wed husband, is abducted. Can she save him from the fate of a clockwork heart before its too late?Book two in The Chronicles of Light and Shadow series, from the award-winning author of A

Conspiracy of Alchemists. Extrait Not all fairy tales end with Happy Ever After. Some begin that way. The girl who casts no shadow has become a wife. The world once again has an Oracle and the realms of Light and Shadow are in harmony. The pact between Alchemist and Nightwalker is no more. It has crumbled to dust and rests in the ruins of Constantinople. And a bargain has been struck. Those of the Council who would harm the girl have agreed to let her be for now. But these are all matters that some say do not fall to the attentions of La Fe Verte. For the universe is vast and I am small. For what can one do but have regard for that tiny part of it which concerns one? I have gained my freedom, but I sometimes find myself missing

Paris and the absinthe-green dreams I used to weave in return for sugar. They have given me my own quarters in the glasshouse that leads off the breakfast room, and I have filled it with green. Angelica and anise blossom in large clay pots amongst the ferns and fancy moth orchids that were brought from far away. But beneath the wooden cladding and frames that allow me to pass unhindered, the glasshouse is still made of iron. And were it not for the stray bumblebees I invite in to stay with me, I would be completely alone in this vast gray city of smog and drizzle. It is a place I have grown to despise, despite my good fortune. I digress. The sunrise is about to call upon the day and there is work to do. For such is the nature of the two realms that make up this world: as happiness and contentment grows in the Light, so from deep within the Shadow, the dark counterparts grow too. Sometimes in the quiet hours of the day I sense it, and I grow very afraid. My mistress is too immersed within her perfect happiness to sense what will come to pass and I do not have the heart to tell her. Yet. Better to let her enjoy her newfound happiness a little longer. She will need thoughts of this happiness to sustain her. Because when the darkness comes, it will take everything.

Chapter 1 Amsterdam, 5 February 1904 The Water Lily creaked happily as she surged against the headwinds that heralded landfall. As she prepared for landing, Elle eased the airship to a lower altitude. Below her, the canals and gingerbread buildings of the city came into view. Amsterdam was as pretty as a picture, but there was no time for sightseeing. Today was a day for business. The Greychester Flying Company was about to collect its first proper freight consignment. Strictly aboveboard and legitimate. Elle smiled with pride. Her very own charter flight business. It was almost as if an invisible hand had granted every wish she had ever had in one magical sweep. She had so many ideas about what she wanted to do with her new venture that she could hardly sleep at night. She ran her gaze around the wood and glass interior of the cockpit. The repairs and improvements that had been made to the Water Lily were superb. Marsh had insisted on installing brand-new navigational instruments and a state-of-the-art balloon-gas relay system. She had protested, but he had been adamant. She was secretly thrilled though. In fact, one would never have thought the Water Lily had been riddled with bullet holes and dangerously close to being scrapped just months before. Bought with his money, not yours . . . the voices whispered to her. Oh, do be quiet you old crones! Elle spoke out loud. The voices who spoke were the Spirit of the Oracle. An amalgamation of fragments from the souls from each woman who had, over the centuries, held the position. Elle knew that when she died, a little part of her would rise up to join them too. And as much as she hated the fact that they were always watching her, it gave her comfort to know that somewhere within that patchwork of souls that made up the nebula she came to know as the voice of the Oracle, was a bit of the mother she never knew. It was just a pity that they were such a bunch of busybodies who always chose to interfere at the most inopportune times. Never forget who you are, child, the voices said in answer to her thoughts. Yes, yes, I am the Oracle, the source of wisdom; the one with the gift of sight; the force that holds the many folds of the universe together; the one who channels power to those who are deserving, she recited the mantra they had taught her in a bored singsong voice.

Trust me, if there is one thing I cannot do, its forget who I am. Now please leave me alone to enjoy this moment, would you? Today I am flying and I want none of this Oracle business spoiling it. As you wish . . . the voices faded away. Just then, the communications consul started rattling and spitting out a ribbon of tape, clearing her for landing. Elle brought the airship round portside and lined her up, ready to dock at one of the platforms that lined the docks on the western district. With a shudder and hiss that sounded almost like a sigh of contentment, the Water Lily berthed. There you go, my dear, Elle said to her ship as she turned the crank handle that released the tether ropes. All safe and sound. Almost as if in answer to that, one of the boiler tank pressure release valves opened to release some engine pressure. Elle opened the hatch and let the ladder rope drop to the ground. With practiced ease, she climbed down and stepped onto the wooden docking platform. Miss Chance, I presume! A tall man with a shock of white-blond hair that was thinning at the top waved at her. Ah, Mr. De Beer. She smiled at him. Welcome to the fair city of Amsterdam. He spoke in an accent that was a touch heavy and rounded on the vowels. Thank you. Its so nice to finally meet you, she said as she shook her new Dutch docking agents huge hand vigorously. And the same to you, he said

graciously. It is an honor to be working with the famous Eleanor Chance. Elle didnt have the heart to correct him on her new surname. Simply being Elle Chance for the day, not Lady Eleanor or Viscountess Greychester, was a bit of a relief, if she was honest with herself. She loved her husband, Hugh, with all her heart, but the pomp and ceremony involved in becoming part of his world over the last few months had been more than a little overwhelming. I have the papers ready here to sign, if you will. Once it is completed, I will tell the men to start loading the freight. I have told them to be extra careful with our precious tulips. Mr. De Beer pointed to the crates of bulbs that were stacked on wooden pallets and tied down with coarse rope. They were indeed ready to be loaded into the hull and destined to brighten the gardens and huge glasshouses of Kew this summer. My men shouldnt take too long. Sign here, if you please, he said as he handed her a wad of papers. Elle felt a pang of sadness when she signed the docking papers and charter before handing them back to Mr. De Beer so he could tear off the counterparts. Patrice, her old agent, had been such fun. In the old days, before Constantinople, Patrice would have taken her to some exotic disreputable bar or caf for a drink while they waited for the freight to be loaded. He would have had her in fits of giggles with his lumbering charm and silly jokes. Despite his betrayal and all the terrible things he did, Elle found herself missing his massive moustache. She had been told afterward that very few bodies were ever recovered from the Constantinople earthquake that had killed almost every living alchemist and a large percentage of the Nightwalker population. They had all been gathered in an underground amphitheater when the vortex their leader, Sir Eustace Abercrombie, had created collapsed, bringing a large part of the city down with it. The last memory Elle had of Patrice was of him hanging on for dear life at the edge of a spinning vortex of complete darkness . . . She closed her eyes at the awful memory. Patrice had simply been sucked into oblivion, never to be seen again. She did not think that a funeral had been held for him and the thought of it made her sad. Such a wasteful and futile quest for absolute power . . . Miss Chance, is everything all right? Mr. De Beer asked. He looked concerned. Elle blinked herself back to the present. Yes, all is well. I was just remembering something. Silly really. She shrugged off her dark thoughts. Patrice had betrayed her, and he had betrayed her husband too, by working as a double agent. Even if he were alive today, she did not think she could forgive the fact that he had sold her to the alchemists as if she were nothing more than a means to gain a profit. But this was the beginning of a new era and she wouldnt allow dark thoughts to taint things. Say, do you know where the pilots mess is? she asked De Beer. Ah, yes, its just over there. Upstairs in that building with the green roof. Thank you. She smiled at De Beer. Take off in three hours? He doffed his flat cap. Will see you then, Miss Chance. The pilots mess room was exactly where Mr. De Beer had said it was, on the first floor of one of the administrative buildings adjacent to the landing docks. The smell of meat stew mingled with the odor of tired bodies hit her right in the nostrils halfway up the stairwell. It was a familiar smell that made her feel warm inside. It was the smell of freedom. The mess was really nothing more than a large, slightly grubby warehouse that had been converted to serve as a canteen and waiting area for pilots and crew between flights. The wooden floorboards were scuffed and gray paint flaked from the walls, in the way that utilitarian buildings seemed to do, but this did not seem to bother anyone. She walked up to the canteen counter and ordered a coffee. It came in a tin mug and had a faint blue-gray film on the surface that hinted at the hours it had been brewing behind the counter. She had just picked up her coffee when someone called her name. Ellie! Only her father and one other person called her that. She spun round to greet the young man who was, at that moment, bounding up to her like an overeager Labrador. Ducky! She hugged him with genuine affection. Or should I rather bow and say, good afternoon, my lady? In one quick move, he converted her hug into a half nelson that would have made any wrestler proud. Elle started laughing and dug her fingers into his ribs to tickle him. This was a practiced maneuver she had perfected while they were in flight school. Richard Ducky Richardson was the brother she never had. Ducky, so called because of his prowess on the cricket field, let go of her. My word, its good to see you. What on earth are you doing here? Im flying. She smoothed her hair back into its customary low knot at the back of her neck. Is that old tub of yours still in the air? he said with amazement. The Water Lily is not a tub. And shes just had a complete overhaul. Id bet shed outrun your manky old ship any day of the week. Ha! Now thats a wager Id like to take. Just name the day and Ill be there. Ducky grinned at her. Oh, Ellie. Its so lovely to see you. Im so sorry I missed the wedding, but I was in Japan and I couldnt get back in time. You did get married awfully quickly, he said with naughty smile. I would have thought you would be busy planning christening breakfasts at the moment. There had been more than a few finely arched eyebrows raised at news of her sudden marriage to Marsh and the gossipmongers were all watching eagerly to see if their suspicions were correct. Oh stop it! Elle felt her cheeks grow warm. When you know something is right, there really is no

reason to wait. And besides, you know I'm not the type of girl who fancies elaborate weddings. Come, let me introduce you to the crew, Ducky said. On the other side of the canteen, a group of men had halted their game of cards and were watching her intently as Ducky steered her over to them. Lads, I'd like to meet my very dear friend Mrs. Eleanor Marsh, or rather, Viscountess Greychester to be precise, Ducky said. Elle, may I present the crew of the Iron Phoenix. He made an overelaborate sweeping gesture. Chairs scraped as the crewmen all rose to their feet, nodded awkwardly and mumbled my lady, in gruff tones. All except one. He was dressed like her, in a white shirt and brown leather coat. Gentlemen, do sit. Today I am simply Elle, the pilot. There really is no need for formalities, please. By all means, join us. The man who was still seated spoke with a soft drawl that immediately placed him from somewhere in the New World, America perhaps, she wasn't sure. She studied the men. Ducky was the embodiment of a clean-cut Englishman. Apple-cheeked, bred from solid stock and good to his bones, his only flaw was his natural sense of adventure. Despite his family's best efforts, he absolutely refused to settle down. It was also one of the things she loved best about him. Sandy was the word that first came to mind when her gaze slid to the American. He had the gravelly, freckly look of a man who had spent the majority of his life outdoors. He wore a fedora pushed back on his head, which he had not bothered to take off indoors. She stared at his hands as they rested on the table. Broad palms, strong fingers. The hands of a man who knew hard work. A soldier's hands, she decided. He was far too suspicious-looking to be a farmer. He gave her a quizzical look. Well, are you going to sit down or not? he asked. ERevue de presse "The soon-to-be high-priestess of British steampunk" (The Independent) "Inventive, lush and full of heart, The Chronicles of Light and Shadow are books to be devoured. Schwarz is a force to be reckoned with" (George Mann)