Ballad: First Love

In the quaint village of Berkshire, resided the Reverend Bernard Powles, a clergyman beloved by at least a hundred souls who regularly attended his sermons. Among these faithful was Ellen, a modest rustic belle renowned for her simplicity and purity. Despite her plain attire, there was no husband in the town who didn't wish for a wife like Ellen, who became affectionately known as the Village Violet. Her innocence and timid beauty captivated the heart of anyone who met her, including Reverend Powles himself.

Reverend Powles, following the conventional courting methods of the time, sought Ellen's affection with all the trite and rehearsed compliments. To Ellen, however, these gestures were as grand as poetry, his winks and hand squeezes filled her with dreams of eternity. To win her heart, Powles even went as far as to summon the musical talents of Godfrey's Grenadiers and others to perform beneath her window, making her birthdays special with serenades by the Covent Garden band. Ellen, living in her secluded happiness, felt immensely blessed to be the object of Powles's love.

Yet, the narrative takes a contemplative turn as the author muses over what Ellen might have seen in Powles, who appeared to lack any appealing qualities. He was not known for his goodness, his looks were unremarkable, and he did not possess the allure of poverty—instead, he was quite the opposite, cursed with wealth and acres. Despite all rational reasons suggesting otherwise, Ellen's love for Powles remained unwavering.

The chapter contrasts the earnest, pure love of Ellen for the Reverend with the seemingly undeserving and unrewarding nature of Powles. This love story, set against the backdrop of a quaint English village, subtly critiques the societal norms of attraction and affection, suggesting that love, in its truest form, transcends the material and superficial aspects often valued in suitors. It paints a picture of an idyllic

rural life where simple, untainted love flourishes despite the perplexities surrounding it.