



CHAPTER TWELVE

The Revelation of the Scarlet Letter

The eloquent sermon came to an end. The enraptured ¹ listeners left the church and in the open air began praising the minister. According to them, no man had ever spoken so wisely, no man had ever been so pious. To them, he was a saint. He was enjoying his moment of glory, while Hester was standing beside the scaffold with the scarlet letter still burning on her breast.

As the military men and magistrates moved onward, all eyes turned to the minister. How weak and pale he looked in the middle of his triumph! The inspiration that had sustained him

1. enraptured : filled with joy, delight.

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during his sermon had left him now that he had performed his duty. He tried to walk on, but he could barely stand erect.

The crowd looked on in awe¹ and wonder. He passed near the scaffold where, years ago, Hester had been shamed. He paused, turned toward the scaffold and stretched out his arms.

"Hester," he said, "come here! Come, my little Pearl!" His aspect was ghastly. The child ran to him and clasped her arms around his knees. Hester went near him slowly against her will.² At that instant, Chillingworth pushed through the crowd to snatch³ back his victim. He caught the minister's arm and said,

"Madman, stop! Send away that woman and this child. Do not blacken your fame and perish in dishonour! I can still save you!"

"Ha, tempter! You are too late!" answered the minister. "With God's help, I will escape you now!"

He again extended his hand to the woman with the scarlet letter.

"Hester Prynne," he cried, with piercing earnestness, "in the name of God, who gave me the grace to do what I did not do seven years ago, come here now! Give me strength, Hester!"

The crowd saw the minister, leaning on Hester's shoulder and supported by her arm around him, ascend the steps of the scaffold. Roger Chillingworth followed them and said, "There is no place on earth where you could have escaped me except on this scaffold!"

The reverend trembled, turned to Hester and said, "Isn't this

1. awe [ɔ:] : admiration, reverence.

2. against her will : unwillingly, she didn't want to go.

3. snatch : pull, take.

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better than what we dreamed of in the forest?"

"I don't know! I don't know!" she replied hurriedly. "Better? Yes, so that we may both die, and little Pearl die with us!"

"For you and Pearl, God is merciful. Now, let me do what I must. Hester, I am a dying man. So let me take my shame upon myself."



Supported in part by Hester, and holding one of Pearl's hands, the Reverend Dimmesdale turned to the rulers, the ministers and the people. They all knew that an important event of his life was about to be revealed to them.

"People of New England!" he cried with a high, solemn voice. "You who have loved me, you who have considered me holy, look at me here, a sinner of the world. At last, I stand upon the spot where, seven years ago, I should have stood with this woman who now sustains me. You have all shuddered at the scarlet letter that Hester wears. But there was a person among you whose sin you did not know!"

The minister fought against his bodily weakness. He stepped passionately forward and said, "It was on him! God's eye saw it! The angels were always pointing to it! The Devil knew it well! But he hid it from his fellow men. Now at this hour of death, he stands up before you. He asks you to look again at Hester Prynne's scarlet letter! He tells you, that with all its mysterious horror, it is but the shadow of what he bears on his own breast."

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With a convulsive motion, he tore away the ministerial band from his breast. It was revealed! But it is irreverent to describe that revelation. For an instant, the gaze of the horror-stricken crowd was concentrated on the ghastly miracle. There was a flush of triumph on his face. Then he sank down on the scaffold. Hester supported his head against her bosom. Old Chillingworth knelt down beside him.

"You have escaped me," he repeated more than once.

"May God forgive you," said the minister. "You, too, have deeply sinned."

He turned to the woman and the child.

"My little Pearl," he said weakly, with a serene smile on his face, "will you kiss me now? You did not want to kiss me in the forest."

Pearl kissed his lips. A spell was broken.

"Hester," said the clergyman, "farewell!"

"Will we not meet again?" she whispered. "Will we not spend our immortal life together? Surely we have paid for our sin!"

"Hush,² Hester, hush!" he said. "We broke the law. We forgot our God. It is therefore vain to hope that we can meet hereafter in an everlasting and pure reunion. God knows and He is merciful. He has proved his mercy in my afflictions. He brought me here to die this death of triumphant ignominy before the people. Praised be his name! His will be done! Farewell!"

That final word came forth with the minister's last breath. The multitude broke out in a strange deep voice of fear and wonder.

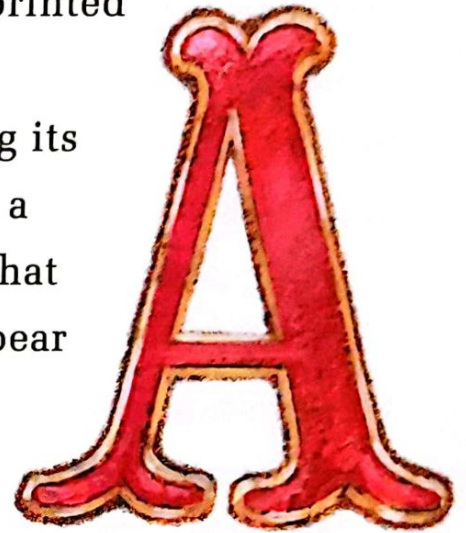
1. **horror-stricken** : shocked, filled with horror.

2. **Hush** : Be quiet! Be silent!

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There was more than one account of what had been witnessed on the scaffold. Most of the spectators testified to having seen on the breast of the unhappy minister, a SCARLET LETTER—the same as that worn by Hester Prynne and imprinted in the flesh.

There were several explanations regarding its origin. Some said that the reverend inflicted a hideous torture on himself. Others claimed that evil old Roger Chillingworth caused it to appear by giving the reverend poisonous and magic drugs. Others contended that the stigma was the effect of remorse and Heaven's dreadful judgement.



Certain persons,¹ who were spectators of the whole scene, denied having seen any mark whatever on his breast. They also said that his dying words did not acknowledge the slightest connection, on his part, with Hester Prynne's scarlet letter. According to these witnesses, he wanted to teach them that, no matter how holy or pure, we are sinners all alike.

This version of Reverend Dimmesdale's story shows the stubborn loyalty with which a man's friend will uphold his character—even when there is clear proof that he is a false and sin-stained creature of the dust.

Within the year, old Roger Chillingworth, having lost his only purpose in life, withered up² and died. In his last will and

1. **persons** : American English; BE people.

2. **withered up** : dried up, decreased in size, faded.

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testament he left a considerable amount of property, both in the New World and in England, to Pearl.

So Pearl—the demon offspring, the elf-child—became the richest heiress of her day in the New World.

After the physician's death, Hester and Pearl disappeared and no one knew where they had gone. Many years passed and one day a tall woman in a grey robe approached the cottage by the seashore, where Hester had lived. It had never been opened in all those years. The woman, with a scarlet letter on her breast, entered the cottage. Hester Prynne had returned.

But where was Pearl? No one ever knew. But through the remainder of Hester's life, there were indications that she was the object of love and interest of an inhabitant of another land. Letters with armorial seals arrived. In the cottage there were articles of comfort and luxury that Hester had never used, which only wealth could have purchased. Once, Hester was seen embroidering a baby garment with lavish¹ richness.

Gossips of that day tell us that Pearl was not only alive, but married, happy and always mindful² of her mother.

Hester had preferred to return to Boston rather than remain in that unknown region where Pearl had found a home. There was a more real life for her here. This was the place of her sin, her sorrow and her penance. She wore the scarlet letter of her own free will. The scarlet letter ceased to be a stigma and was looked upon with awe and reverence.

1. **lavish** : extravagant, excessive.

2. **mindful** : giving thought or careful attention, not forgetful.

Hester lived unselfishly and devoted her life to comforting and counselling women who were burdened with sorrow, sin and suffering.

Women came to her asking why they were so wretched,¹ and what could be done to relieve their troubles. Hester assured them that one day there would be a drastic transformation in society. The whole relationship between men and women would change, bringing greater justice and happiness.

After many, many years a new grave was dug near an old, sunken one in the burial ground beside the King's Chapel. There was a space between them, as if the dust of the two sleepers had no right to mingle.² One tombstone served for both. On this simple slab of slate, there appeared an engraved coat of arms. It had this inscription, that might serve as a motto and brief description of our legend:

ON A FIELD, SABLE,³ THE LETTER A, GULES.⁴

1. **wretched** : very unhappy, depressed, hopeless.
2. **mingle** : mix, unite.
3. **sable** : black.
4. **gules** : red.