



CHAPTER SIX

The Governor's Hall



ne day, Hester went to Governor Bellingham's mansion to return a pair of gloves that he had given her to embroider. She had decided to return the embroidered gloves, and talk to him regarding certain gossip that she had recently heard. The townspeople had been saying that Governor Bellingham and other leading citizens wanted to take Pearl away from her mother since she was considered a lowly sinner, and could not possibly raise her child in a Christian way. *If* the child was really capable of moral and religious growth, and possessed the elements of salvation, then she would be better off away from her mother. Hester, therefore, was determined to talk to the governor and convince him to let her keep Pearl.

For this occasion, Pearl was wearing a crimson ¹ velvet dress, abundantly embroidered with gold thread. Pearl possessed a rich and luxuriant beauty. There was a fire in her; she seemed the unpremeditated offshoot ² of a passionate moment.

The child's appearance was an inevitable reminder of what Hester was condemned to wear on her bosom. Pearl was the scarlet letter in another form—the living scarlet letter!

They reached the governor's mansion and a bond-servant opened the door.

"Is Governor Bellingham in?" inquired Hester.

"Yes, he is," replied the bond-servant, staring with wide-open eyes at the scarlet letter. "But he is talking to a minister and to other gentlemen. You cannot see him now."

"I will enter anyway," answered Hester.

The mother and little Pearl were admitted into the entrance hall. The governor was returning from a walk in his garden with Mr Wilson.

Behind the governor and Mr Wilson came two other guests: the young Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale and old Roger Chillingworth. Chillingworth had settled in the town about three years ago, and worked as a physician. He was a friend of the young minister, whose health had been suffering lately.

As the governor entered the hall, he immediately noticed the little scarlet figure before him. "How did this guest enter my hall?" he asked.

"Indeed," cried Mr Wilson, "who is this little scarlet bird?"

1. **crimson** : purple-red colour.

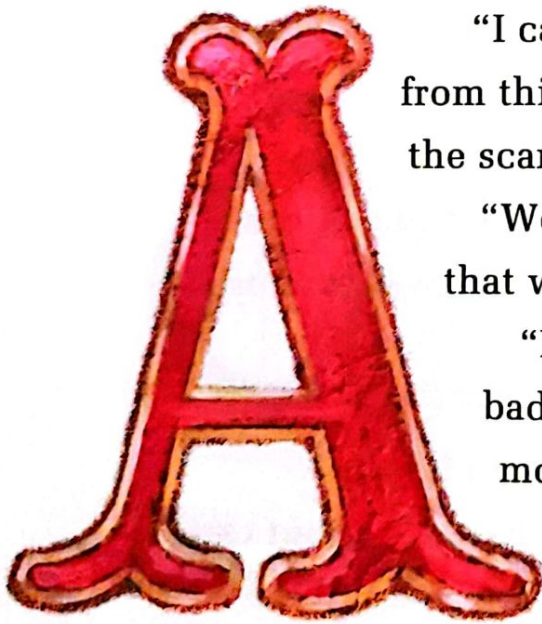
2. **unpremeditated offshoot** : unplanned product or branch.

The Scarlet Letter

Who are you and why has your mother dressed you in this strange way?"

"I am mother's child," answered the scarlet vision, "and my name is Pearl."

Governor Bellingham looked sternly at Hester and said, "Hester Prynne, we have been worried about your child's salvation. Is it right for you, who has fallen into sin, to be responsible for the religious and moral instruction of your child? This child needs to be dressed soberly, disciplined strictly and instructed in the truths of heaven and earth. What can you do for her?"



"I can teach my little Pearl what I have learned from this!" answered Hester, laying her finger on the scarlet letter.

"Woman, it is because of this badge ¹ of shame that we want to give the child to other hands."

"Nevertheless," said the mother calmly, "this badge has taught me, and is teaching me at this moment, lessons that can make my child wiser and better."

"We will judge carefully," said Governor Bellingham. "Reverend Wilson, examine Pearl and see whether she has had the Christian instruction for a child of her age."

The old minister sat down and tried to draw ² Pearl near him.

1. badge : sign.

2. draw : move, pull.

"Pearl," he said solemnly, "can you tell me who made you?"

Now Pearl knew very well who made her because Hester had talked to her about the Heavenly Father. For a child of three years old, she knew many things concerning catechism. But she refused to answer Reverend Wilson's question. After putting her finger in her mouth and refusing to speak, she finally said that she had not been made at all—she had been picked off a bush of wild roses by her mother!

Old Roger Chillingworth smiled and whispered something in the young minister's ear. Hester looked at Chillingworth and saw how much uglier he had become.

"This is awful!" cried the governor. "Here is a child of three years old who does not know who made her! We do not need to discuss the matter any further."

Hester picked up Pearl and held the child tightly in her arms. "God gave me this child! She is my only happiness. She keeps me alive! You will not take her! I will die first!"

"My poor woman, the child will be well cared for!"

"God gave her to me," repeated Hester raising her voice. "I will not give her up." She suddenly turned to Mr Dimmesdale and said, "Speak for me! You are my pastor and are responsible for my soul! You know me better than these men. You know what is in my heart. Speak for me!"

Reverend Dimmesdale looked thinner and more troubled than when he had questioned Hester three years earlier.

"There is truth in what she says," began the minister with a sweet, tremulous, but powerful voice. "God gave her the child and the instinctive knowledge of its nature and needs, which no

The Scarlet Letter

other mortal can possess. Moreover, there is a quality of sacredness¹ in the relation between this mother and child."

"How is that, Master Dimmesdale?" interrupted the governor.

"This child has come from the hand of God to work in many ways upon the mother's heart. It was meant to be a blessing; the one blessing in her life! This child was meant to keep her mother's soul alive, and to preserve her from blacker depths of sin. Therefore, it is good for this poor, sinful woman to care for the child. The child will remind her of her fall. Let us follow God's wish."

"You speak with a strange earnestness,"² said old Roger Chillingworth, smiling at him.

"My young brother has spoken well," said Reverend Wilson.

"Indeed, he has," answered the governor. "We will leave the matter as it now stands. The child, however, must be examined in catechism, either by Reverend Wilson or Master Dimmesdale. And at the right time, she must go to school and to meeting."³

After having spoken, the young minister stood by the window and looked out. Pearl, that wild little elf,⁴ went to him, took his hand in both of hers and put it against her cheek. The minister



1. **sacredness** : religious or holy quality.
2. **earnestness** : seriousness, sincerity.
3. **meeting** : (here) religious service or religious meeting.
4. **elf** : misbehaved fairy who plays tricks on people.

The Governor's Hall

looked down, laid his hand on the child's head and then kissed her forehead.

"A strange child!" said old Roger Chillingworth. "It's easy to see the mother's part in her. Would it be so difficult to analyse the child's nature and then try to guess who the father is?"

"No, it would be sinful," said Reverend Wilson. "It is better to leave the mystery as we find it, unless Providence reveals it to us."

Everything was satisfactorily concluded, and Hester and Pearl left the governor's mansion. As they went down the steps, they met Mistress Hibbins, the governor's bad-tempered sister, who was later executed ¹ as a witch.

She looked at Hester and asked, "Will you go to the forest with us tonight? I promised the Black Man ² that you would come."

"I must stay at home to look after Pearl. If they had taken her away from me, I would have gone with you willingly, and I would have signed my name in the Black Man's book with my own blood."

1. **executed** : killed as lawful punishment.

2. **Black Man** : satan, devil.

1 Choose the correct answer.

- a. Hester went to Governor Bellingham's mansion to
- ☐ return a lost glove
 - ☐ return a pair of embroidered gloves
 - ☐ return an embroidered garment
- b. The governor and other leading citizens wanted to
- ☐ send Pearl to catechism class
 - ☐ save Hester's soul
 - ☐ take Pearl away from Hester
- c. They felt that Hester
- ☐ was not capable of raising her child in a Christian way
 - ☐ did not possess the elements of salvation
 - ☐ was not a good church member
- d. Hester said that she could teach Pearl
- ☐ what she had learned from the scarlet letter
 - ☐ the truth about heaven and earth
 - ☐ catechism
- e. Reverend Wilson examined Pearl in catechism but
- ☐ she refused to speak to him
 - ☐ she ran away to the garden
 - ☐ she did not answer his question correctly
- f. When Governor Bellingham decided to take Pearl away from her mother
- ☐ Hester grabbed Pearl and ran out of the mansion
 - ☐ Hester asked Reverend Dimmesdale to intervene
 - ☐ Hester began crying desperately
- g. After Reverend Dimmesdale had convinced the governor to let Hester keep the child
- ☐ Pearl took his hand in both of hers
 - ☐ Pearl kissed his hand
 - ☐ Hester went to thank the minister
- h. On their way out of the governor's mansion, Hester and Pearl met Mistress Hibbins
- ☐ who was the minister's sister
 - ☐ who invited Hester to meet the Black Man in the forest
 - ☐ who accused Hester of being a witch
- i. The Black Man was believed to be
- ☐ a mysterious minister
 - ☐ an Indian
 - ☐ the devil

Third conditional

Look at this sentence from Chapter 6:

They **had taken** her away from me, I **would have gone** with you willingly, and I **would have signed** my name in the Black Man's book with my own blood.

We use the third conditional to talk about something that *didn't* happen or a situation that *didn't exist* in the past.

We use the Past Perfect in the "if" clause and the Past Conditional in the main clause. Look at these examples:

If Hester **had never met** Dimmesdale, she **would never have** sinned.

The governor **would have taken** Pearl away from her mother, if Reverend Dimmesdale **had not intervened**.

Look at this dialogue between Roger Chillingworth and Hester. Complete it using the *Past Perfect* and *would have*.

Hester: If I (not be) so poor, I (not marry) you, Roger.

Roger: If I (listen) to my old mother, I (remain) alone. She was very wise, and she knew you could not be trusted.

Hester: Your mother (trust) me, if she (know) me better. I am not a faithless person. If you (not send) me to Boston alone, this (not happen)

Roger: If you (avoid) temptation, we (be) a respectable family. But we are not! We are a disgrace!

Hester: If the judges (decide) on the death penalty, I (not disgrace) our family.

Odd one out!

3 Circle the word that doesn't belong to the group.

- a. scarlet red heart purple crimson
- b. catechism religion salvation gossip damnation
- c. health guest illness doctor medicine
- d. forest mansion home cottage building
- e. God Providence Heavenly Father Creator governor
- f. sister servant daughter brother son
- g. pastor minister physician clergyman reverend

4 Now, use the words that you have just circled to fill in the gaps in these sentences.

- a. Hester wanted to talk to Governor Bellingham about certain that she had heard.
- b. A bond- opened the door.
- c. This child has come from God to work upon the mother's
- d. How did this enter my hall?
- e. The looked sternly at Hester.
- f. Will you go to the with us tonight?
- g. The townspeople felt fortunate to have a learned in the settlement.