

NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

# THE SCARLET LETTER





Чтение в оригинале (Каро)

Натаниель Готорн

**The Scarlet Letter / Алая  
буква. Книга для чтения  
на английском языке**

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Натаниель Готорн (1804–1864) – один из наиболее значительных американских писателей XIX века. Предлагаем вниманию читателей одно из самых известных его произведений, роман «Алая буква» (1850), первый американский роман, вызвавший широкий резонанс в Европе. В книге приводится неадаптированный текст романа в сокращении с комментариями и словарем.

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# **Nathaniel Hawthorne / Натаниель Готорн**

## **The Scarlet Letter / Алая буква**

*Подготовка текста, комментарии и словарь Д. В. Павлоцкого*

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## I

### The Prison Door

A throng of bearded men, in sad-coloured garments and grey steeple-crowned hats, intermixed with women, some wearing hoods, and others bareheaded, was assembled in front of a wooden edifice, the door of which was heavily timbered with oak, and studded with iron spikes.

The founders of a new colony, whatever Utopia of human virtue and happiness they might originally project, have invariably recognised it among their earliest practical necessities to allot a portion of the virgin soil as a cemetery, and another portion as the site of a prison. In accordance with this rule it may safely be assumed that the forefathers of Boston had built the first prison-house somewhere in the Vicinity of Cornhill, almost as seasonably as they marked out the first burial-ground, on Isaac Johnson's<sup>1</sup> lot, and round about his grave, which subsequently became the nucleus of all the congregated sepulchres in the old churchyard of King's Chapel<sup>2</sup>. Certain it is that, some fifteen or twenty years after the settlement of the town, the wooden jail was already marked with weather-stains and other indications of age, which gave a yet darker aspect to its beetle-browed and gloomy front. Like all that pertains to crime, it seemed never to have known a youthful era. Before this ugly edifice, and between it and the wheel-track of the street, was a grass-plot, much overgrown with unsightly vegetation, which evidently found something congenial in the soil that had so early borne the black flower of civilised society, a prison. But on one side of the portal, and rooted almost at the threshold, was a wild rose-bush with its delicate gems, which might be imagined to offer their fragrance and fragile beauty to the prisoner as he went in, and to the condemned criminal as he came forth to his doom, in token that the deep heart of Nature could pity and be kind to him.

This rose-bush, by a strange chance, has been kept alive in history; but whether it had merely survived out of the stern old wilderness, so long after the fall of the gigantic pines and oaks that originally overshadowed it, or whether, as there is fair authority for believing, it had sprung up under the footsteps of the sainted Ann Hutchinson<sup>3</sup> as she entered the prison-door, we shall not take upon us to determine. Finding it so directly on the threshold of our narrative, which is now about to issue from that inauspicious portal, we could hardly do otherwise than pluck one of its flowers, and present it to the reader. It may serve, let us hope, to symbolise some sweet moral blossom that may be found along the track, or relieve the darkening close of a tale of human frailty and sorrow.

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<sup>1</sup> **Isaac Johnson** – Айзек Джонсон, один из ранних колонистов, обосновавшихся в Бостоне

<sup>2</sup> **King's Chapel** – Королевская церковь, старинная церковь в Бостоне

<sup>3</sup> **Ann Hutchinson** – Энн Хетчинсон (1591–1643), глава религиозной секты антиномистов, утверждавших, что верующий сливается со святым духом без посредства церкви и священников. В 1636–1637 годах ее судили и приговорили к отлучению от церкви

## II

### The Market-Place

The grass-plot before the jail, in Prison Lane, on a certain summer morning, not less than two centuries ago, was occupied by a pretty large number of the inhabitants of Boston, all with their eyes intently fastened on the iron-clamped oaken door. Amongst any other population, or at a later period in the history of New England, the grim rigidity that petrified the bearded physiognomies of these good people would have augured some awful business in hand. But, in that early severity of the Puritan character, it might be that a sluggish bond-servant, or an undutiful child, whom his parents had given over to the civil authority, was to be corrected at the whipping-post. It might be that an Antinomian, a Quaker<sup>4</sup>, or other heterodox religionist, was to be scourged out of the town, or an idle or vagrant Indian, whom the white man's firewater had made riotous about the streets. It might be, too, that a witch, like old Mistress Hibbins, was to die upon the gallows. In either case, there was very much the same solemnity of demeanour on the part of the spectators, as befitted a people among whom religion and law were almost identical, and in whose character both were so thoroughly interfused, that the mildest and severest acts of public discipline were alike made venerable and awful. On the other hand, a penalty which, in our days, would infer a degree of mocking infamy and ridicule, might then be invested with almost as stern a dignity as the punishment of death itself.

It was a circumstance to be noted on the summer morning when our story begins its course, that the women, of whom there were several in the crowd, appeared to take a peculiar interest in whatever penal infliction might be expected to ensue. The age had not so much refinement, that any sense of impropriety restrained the wearers of petticoat and farthingale from stepping forth into the public ways, and wedging their not unsubstantial persons, if occasion were, into the throng nearest to the scaffold at an execution. Morally, as well as materially, there was a coarser fibre in those wives and maidens of old English birth and breeding than in their fair descendants.

"Goodwives," said a hard-featured dame of fifty, "I'll tell ye a piece of my mind. It would be greatly for the public behoof if we women, being of mature age and church-members in good repute, should have the handling of such malefactresses as this Hester Prynne. If the hussy stood up for judgment before us five, that are now here in a knot together, would she come off with such a sentence as the worshipful magistrates have awarded? Marry, I trow not."

"People say," said another, "that the Reverend Master Dimmesdale, her godly pastor, takes it very grievously to heart that such a scandal should have come upon his congregation."

"The magistrates are God-fearing gentlemen, but merciful overmuch," added a third autumnal matron. "At the very least, they should have put the brand of a hot iron on Hester Prynne's forehead. But little will she care what they put upon the bodice of her gown! Why, look you, she may cover it with a brooch, or such like heathenish adornment, and so walk the streets as brave as ever!"

"Ah, but," interposed, more softly, a young wife, holding a child by the hand, "let her cover the mark as she will, the pang of it will be always in her heart."

"What do we talk of marks and brands, whether on the bodice of her gown or the flesh of her forehead?" cried another female, the ugliest as well as the most pitiless of these self-constituted judges. "This woman has brought shame upon us all, and ought to die; is there not law for it? Truly there is, both in the Scripture and the statute-book. Then let the magistrates, who have made it of no effect, thank themselves if their own wives and daughters go astray."

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<sup>4</sup> a **Quaker** – квакеры, религиозная секта, основанная Джорджем Фоксом (1624–1691), протестантское христианское движение

“Mercy on us, goodwife!” exclaimed a man in the crowd, “is there no virtue in woman, save what springs from a wholesome fear of the gallows? Hush now, gossips, for here comes Mistress Prynne herself.”

The door of the jail being flung open from within there appeared, in the first place the grim and grisly presence of the town-beadle. This personage prefigured and represented in his aspect the whole dismal severity of the Puritanic code of law, which it was his business to administer in its final and closest application to the offender. Stretching forth the official staff in his left hand, he laid his right upon the shoulder of a young woman, whom he thus drew forward, until, on the threshold of the prison-door, she repelled him, by an action marked with natural dignity and force of character, and stepped into the open air as if by her own free will. She bore in her arms a child, a baby of some three months old, who winked and turned aside its little face from the too vivid light of day; because its existence, heretofore, had brought it acquaintance only with the grey twilight of a dungeon, or other darksome apartment of the prison.

When the young woman stood fully revealed before the crowd, it seemed to be her first impulse to clasp the infant closely to her bosom; not so much by an impulse of motherly affection, as that she might thereby conceal a certain token, which was wrought or fastened into her dress. In a moment, however, wisely judging that one token of her shame would but poorly serve to hide another, she took the baby on her arm, and with a burning blush, and yet a haughty smile, and a glance that would not be abashed, looked around at her townspeople and neighbours. On the breast of her gown, in fine red cloth, surrounded with an elaborate embroidery and fantastic flourishes of gold thread, appeared the letter A<sup>5</sup>. It was so artistically done, and with so much fertility and gorgeous luxuriance of fancy, that it had all the effect of a last and fitting decoration to the apparel which she wore, and which was of a splendour in accordance with the taste of the age, but greatly beyond what was allowed by the sumptuary regulations of the colony.

The young woman was tall, with a figure of perfect elegance on a large scale. She had dark and abundant hair, so glossy that it threw off the sunshine with a gleam; and a face which, besides being beautiful from regularity of feature and richness of complexion, had the impressiveness belonging to a marked brow and deep black eyes. She was ladylike, too, after the manner of the feminine gentility of those days; characterised by a certain state and dignity, rather than by the delicate, evanescent, and indescribable grace which is now recognised as its indication. And never had Hester Prynne appeared more ladylike, in the antique interpretation of the term, than as she issued from the prison. Those who had before known her, and had expected to behold her dimmed and obscured by a disastrous cloud, were astonished, and even startled, to perceive how her beauty shone out, and made a halo of the misfortune and ignominy in which she was enveloped. Her attire, which she had wrought for the occasion in prison, seemed to express the attitude of her spirit, the desperate recklessness of her mood, by its wild and picturesque peculiarity. But the point which drew all eyes, and, as it were, transfigured the wearer – so that both men and women who had been familiarly acquainted with Hester Prynne were now impressed as if they beheld her for the first time – was that SCARLET LETTER, so fantastically embroidered and illuminated upon her bosom. It had the effect of a spell, taking her out of the ordinary relations with humanity, and enclosing her in a sphere by herself.

“She hath good skill at her needle, that’s certain,” remarked one of her female spectators; “but did ever a woman, before this brazen hussy, contrive such a way of showing it? Why, gossips, what is it but to laugh in the faces of our godly magistrates, and make a pride out of what they, worthy gentlemen, meant for a punishment?”

“It were well,” muttered the most iron-visaged of the old dames, “if we stripped Madame Hester’s rich gown off her dainty shoulders; and as for the red letter which she hath stitched so curiously, I’ll bestow a rag of mine own rheumatic flannel to make a fitter one!”

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<sup>5</sup> А – сокр. от **Adulteress** – прелюбодейка



“Oh, peace, neighbours!” whispered their youngest companion; “Not a stitch in that embroidered letter but she has felt it in her heart.”

The grim beadle now made a gesture with his staff. “Make way, good people!” cried he. “And I promise ye, Mistress Prynne shall be set where man, woman, and child may have a fair sight of her brave apparel from this time till an hour past meridian. A blessing on the righteous colony of the Massachusetts, where iniquity is dragged out into the sunshine! Come along, Madame Hester, and show your scarlet letter in the market-place!”

A lane was forthwith opened through the crowd of spectators. Preceded by the beadle, and attended by an irregular procession of stern-browed men and unkindly visaged women, Hester Prynne set forth towards the place appointed for her punishment. It was no great distance, in those days, from the prison door to the market-place. Measured by the prisoner’s experience, however, it might be reckoned a journey of some length; for haughty as her demeanour was, she perchance underwent an agony from every footstep of those that thronged to see her, as if her heart had been flung into the street for them all to spurn and trample upon. In our nature, however, there is a provision, alike marvellous and merciful, that the sufferer should never know the intensity of what he endures by its present torture, but chiefly by the pang that rankles after it. With almost a serene deportment, therefore, Hester Prynne passed through this portion of her ordeal, and came to a sort of scaffold, at the western extremity of the market-place.

In fact, this scaffold constituted a portion of a penal machine, which was held, in the old time, to be an effectual agent, in the promotion of good citizenship. It was, in short, the platform of the pillory; and above it rose the framework of that instrument of discipline, so fashioned as to confine the human head in its tight grasp, and thus hold it up to the public gaze. There can be no outrage, methinks, more flagrant than to forbid the culprit to hide his face for shame. In Hester Prynne’s instance, however, her sentence bore that she should stand a certain time upon the platform, but without undergoing that gripe about the neck. Knowing well her part, she ascended a flight of wooden steps, and was thus displayed to the surrounding multitude, at about the height of a man’s shoulders above the street.

The scene was not without a mixture of awe, such as must always invest the spectacle of guilt and shame in a fellow-creature, before society shall have grown corrupt enough to smile, instead of shuddering at it. They were stern enough to look upon Hester Prynne’s death, had that been the sentence, without a murmur at its severity, but had none of the heartlessness of another social state, which would find only a theme for jest in an exhibition like the present. Even had there been a disposition to turn the matter into ridicule, it must have been repressed and overpowered by the solemn presence of men no less dignified than the governor, a judge, a general, and the ministers of the town, all of whom sat or stood in a balcony of the meeting-house, looking down upon the platform. The unhappy culprit sustained herself as best a woman might, under the heavy weight of a thousand unrelenting eyes, all concentrated at her bosom. It was almost intolerable to be borne. Of an impulsive and passionate nature, she had fortified herself to encounter every variety of insult; but there was a quality much more terrible in the solemn mood of the popular mind. Had a roar of laughter burst from the multitude Hester Prynne might have repaid them all with a bitter and disdainful smile. But, under the leaden infliction which it was her doom to endure, she felt, at moments, as if she must needs shriek out with the full power of her lungs, and cast herself from the scaffold down upon the ground, or else go mad at once.

Yet there were intervals when the whole scene seemed to vanish from her eyes, or, at least, glimmered indistinctly before them, like a mass of imperfectly shaped and spectral images. Her mind, and especially her memory, was preternaturally active, and kept bringing up reminiscences. Possibly, it was an instinctive device of her spirit to relieve itself by the exhibition of these phantasmagoric forms, from the cruel weight and hardness of the reality.

Be that as it might, the scaffold of the pillory revealed to Hester Prynne the entire track along which she had been treading, since her happy infancy. She saw again her native village, in Old

England, and her paternal home: a decayed house of grey stone, with a poverty-stricken aspect, but retaining a half obliterated shield of arms over the portal, in token of antique gentility. She saw her father's face, with its bold brow, and reverend white beard that flowed over the old-fashioned Elizabethan ruff; her mother's, too, with the look of heedful and anxious love which it always wore in her remembrance, and which, even since her death, had so often laid the impediment of a gentle remonstrance in her daughter's pathway. She saw her own face, glowing with girlish beauty, and illuminating all the interior of the dusky mirror. There she beheld another countenance, of a man well stricken in years, a pale, thin, scholar-like visage, with eyes dim and bleared by the lamplight that had served them to pore over many ponderous books. Yet those same bleared optics had a strange, penetrating power, when it was their owner's purpose to read the human soul. This figure of the study and the cloister was slightly deformed, with the left shoulder a trifle higher than the right. Next rose before her a continental city; where new life had awaited her, still in connexion with the misshapen scholar: a new life, but feeding itself on time-worn materials, like a tuft of green moss on a crumbling wall. Lastly, in lieu of these shifting scenes, came back the rude market-place of the Puritan, settlement, with all the townspeople assembled, and levelling their stern regards at herself who stood on the scaffold of the pillory, an infant on her arm, and the letter A, in scarlet, fantastically embroidered with gold thread, upon her bosom.

Could it be true? She clutched the child so fiercely to her breast that it sent forth a cry; she turned her eyes downward at the scarlet letter, and even touched it with her finger, to assure herself that the infant and the shame were real. Yes these were her realities – all else had vanished!

### III

## The Recognition

From this intense consciousness of being the object of severe and universal observation, the wearer of the scarlet letter was at length relieved, by discerning, on the outskirts of the crowd, a figure which irresistibly took possession of her thoughts. An Indian in his native garb was standing there. By the Indian's side, and evidently sustaining a companionship with him, stood a white man, clad in a strange disarray of civilized and savage costume.

He was small in stature, with a furrowed visage, which as yet could hardly be termed aged. There was a remarkable intelligence in his features, as of a person who had so cultivated his mental part that it could not fail to mould the physical to itself and become manifest by unmistakable tokens. Although, by a seemingly careless arrangement of his heterogeneous garb, he had endeavoured to conceal or abate the peculiarity, it was sufficiently evident to Hester Prynne that one of this man's shoulders rose higher than the other. Again, at the first instant of perceiving that thin visage, and the slight deformity of the figure, she pressed her infant to her bosom with a convulsive force.

At his arrival in the market-place, and some time before she saw him, the stranger had bent his eyes on Hester Prynne. It was carelessly at first, like a man chiefly accustomed to look inward. Very soon, however, his look became keen and penetrative. A writhing horror twisted itself across his features, like a snake gliding swiftly over them, and making one little pause, with all its wreathed intervolutions in open sight. His face darkened with some powerful emotion, which, nevertheless, he so instantaneously controlled by an effort of his will, that, save at a single moment, its expression might have passed for calmness. When he found the eyes of Hester Prynne fastened on his own, and saw that she appeared to recognize him, he slowly and calmly raised his finger, made a gesture with it in the air, and laid it on his lips.

Then touching the shoulder of a townsman who stood near to him, he addressed him in a formal and courteous manner:

"I pray you, good Sir," said he, "who is this woman? – and wherefore is she here set up to public shame?"

"You must needs be a stranger in this region, friend, else you would surely have heard of Mistress Hester Prynne and her evil doings."

"You say truly," replied the other; "I am a stranger, and have been a wanderer, sorely against my will. I have met with grievous mishaps by sea and land, and have been long held in bonds among the heathen-folk to the southward; and am now brought hither by this Indian to be redeemed out of my captivity. Will it please you, therefore, to tell me of this woman's offences, and what has brought her to yonder scaffold?"

"Truly, friend; and methinks it must gladden your heart, after your troubles and sojourn in the wilderness," said the townsman, "to find yourself at length in a land where iniquity is searched out and punished in the sight of rulers and people, as here in our godly New England. Yonder woman, Sir, you must know, was the wife of a certain learned man, English by birth, but who had long ago dwelt in Amsterdam, whence some good time ago he was minded to cross over and cast in his lot with us of the Massachusetts. To this purpose he sent his wife before him, remaining himself to look after some necessary affairs. Marry, good Sir, in some two years, or less, that the woman has been a dweller here in Boston, no tidings have come of this learned gentleman, Master Prynne; and his young wife, look you, being left to her own misguidance —"

"Ah! – I conceive you," said the stranger with a bitter smile. "So learned a man as you speak of should have learned this too in his books. And who, by your favour, Sir, may be the father of yonder babe?"

“Of a truth, friend, that matter remaineth a riddle,” answered the townsman. “Madame Hester absolutely refuseth to speak, and the magistrates have laid their heads together in vain. Peradventure the guilty one stands looking on at this sad spectacle, unknown of man, and forgetting that God sees him.”

“The learned man,” observed the stranger with another smile, “should come himself to look into the mystery.”

“It behoves him well if he be still in life,” responded the townsman. “Now, good Sir, our Massachusetts magistracy, bethinking themselves that this woman is youthful and fair, and doubtless was strongly tempted to her fall, and that, moreover, as is most likely, her husband may be at the bottom of the sea, they have not been bold to put in force the extremity of our righteous law against her. The penalty thereof is death. But in their great mercy and tenderness of heart they have doomed Mistress Prynne to stand only a space of three hours on the platform of the pillory, and then and thereafter, for the remainder of her natural life to wear a mark of shame upon her bosom.”

“A wise sentence,” remarked the stranger, gravely, bowing his head. “Thus she will be a living sermon against sin, until the ignominious letter be engraved upon her tombstone. It irks me, nevertheless, that the partner of her iniquity should not at least, stand on the scaffold by her side. But he will be known – he will be known!”

He bowed courteously to the communicative townsman, and whispering a few words to his Indian attendant, they both made their way through the crowd.

While this passed, Hester Prynne had been standing on her pedestal, still with a fixed gaze towards the stranger – all other objects in the visible world seemed to vanish, leaving only him and her. Such an interview, perhaps, would have been more terrible than even to meet him as she now did, with the hot mid-day sun burning down upon her face, and lighting up its shame; with the scarlet token of infamy on her breast; with the sin-born infant in her arms; with a whole people, drawn forth as to a festival. Dreadful as it was, she was conscious of a shelter in the presence of these thousand witnesses. It was better to stand thus than to greet him face to face. Involved in these thoughts, she scarcely heard a voice behind her until it had repeated her name more than once, in a loud and solemn tone, audible to the whole multitude.

“Hearken unto me, Hester Prynne!” said the voice.

Directly over the platform on which Hester Prynne stood was an open gallery. Here, to witness the scene which we are describing, sat Governor Bellingham himself – a gentleman advanced in years, with a hard experience written in his wrinkles. He was not ill-fitted to be the head and representative of a community which owed its origin and progress, and its present state of development, not to the impulses of youth, but to the stern and tempered energies of manhood and the sombre sagacity of age; accomplishing so much, precisely because it imagined and hoped so little. The other eminent characters by whom the chief ruler was surrounded were distinguished by a dignity of mien. They were, doubtless, good men, just and sage. But, out of the whole human family, it would not have been easy to select the same number of wise and virtuous persons, who should be less capable of sitting in judgment on an erring woman’s heart, and disentangling its mesh of good and evil, than the sages of rigid aspect towards whom Hester Prynne now turned her face.

The voice which had called her attention was that of the reverend and famous John Wilson, the eldest clergyman of Boston, a great scholar, and withal a man of kind and genial spirit. This last attribute, however, had been less carefully developed than his intellectual gifts, and was, in truth, rather a matter of shame than self-congratulation with him. He looked like the darkly engraved portraits which we see prefixed to old volumes of sermons, and had no more right than one of those portraits would have to meddle with a question of human guilt, passion, and anguish.

“Hester Prynne,” said the clergyman, “I have striven with my young brother here, under whose preaching of the Word you have been privileged to sit,” – here Mr. Wilson laid his hand on the shoulder of a pale young man beside him – “I have sought, I say, to persuade this godly youth, that

he should deal with you, here in the face of Heaven, and before these wise and upright rulers, and in hearing of all the people, as touching the vileness and blackness of your sin. Knowing your natural temper better than I, he could the better judge what arguments to use, whether of tenderness or terror, such as might prevail over your hardness and obstinacy, insomuch that you should no longer hide the name of him who tempted you to this grievous fall. But he opposes to me – with a young man's over-softness, albeit wise beyond his years – that it were wronging the very nature of woman to force her to lay open her heart's secrets in such broad daylight, and in presence of so great a multitude. Truly, as I sought to convince him, the shame lay in the commission of the sin, and not in the showing of it forth. What say you to it, once again, brother Dimmesdale? Must it be thou, or I, that shall deal with this poor sinner's soul?"

The directness of this appeal drew the eyes of the whole crowd upon the Reverend Mr. Dimmesdale – young clergyman, who had come from one of the great English universities, bringing all the learning of the age into our wild forest land. His eloquence and religious fervour had already given the earnest of high eminence in his profession. He was a person of very striking aspect, with a white, lofty, and impending brow; large, brown, melancholy eyes, and a mouth which, unless when he forcibly compressed it, was apt to be tremulous, expressing both nervous sensibility and a vast power of self-restraint. Notwithstanding his high native gifts and scholar-like attainments, there was an air about this young minister – a startled, a half-frightened look – as of a being who felt himself quite astray, and at a loss in the pathway of human existence, and could only be at ease in some seclusion of his own. Therefore, so far as his duties would permit, he trod in the shadowy by-paths, and thus kept himself simple and childlike, coming forth, when occasion was, with a freshness and dewy purity of thought, which, as many people said, affected them like the speech of an angel.

Such was the young man whom the Reverend Mr. Wilson introduced so openly, bidding him speak, in the hearing of all men, to that mystery of a woman's soul, so sacred even in its pollution. The trying nature of his position drove the blood from his cheek, and made his lips tremulous.

The Reverend Mr. Dimmesdale bent his head, in silent prayer, as it seemed, and then came forward.

"Hester Prynne," said he, leaning over the balcony and looking down steadfastly into her eyes, "If thou feelest it to be for thy soul's peace, and that thy earthly punishment will thereby be made more effectual to salvation, I charge thee<sup>6</sup> to speak out the name of thy fellow-sinner and fellow-sufferer! Be not silent from any mistaken pity and tenderness for him; for, believe me, Hester, though he were to step down from a high place, and stand there beside thee, on thy pedestal of shame, yet better were it so than to hide a guilty heart through life. What can thy silence do for him, except it tempt him, add hypocrisy to sin? Heaven hath granted thee an open ignominy, that thereby thou mayest work out an open triumph over the evil within thee and the sorrow without. Take heed how thou deniest to him – who, perchance, hath not the courage to grasp it for himself – the bitter, but wholesome, cup that is now presented to thy lips!"

The young pastor's voice was tremulously sweet, rich, deep, and broken. The feeling that it so evidently manifested, rather than the direct purport of the words, caused it to vibrate within all hearts, and brought the listeners into one accord of sympathy. Even the poor baby at Hester's bosom was affected by the same influence, for it directed its hitherto vacant gaze towards Mr. Dimmesdale, and held up its little arms with a half-pleased, half-plaintive murmur. So powerful seemed the minister's appeal that the people could not believe but that Hester Prynne would speak out the guilty name, or else that the guilty one himself would be drawn forth by an inward and inevitable necessity, and compelled to ascend the scaffold.

Hester shook her head.

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<sup>6</sup> **thee** – (уст.) тебя, тебе, тобой

“Woman, transgress not beyond the limits of Heaven’s mercy!” cried the Reverend Mr. Wilson, harshly. “Speak out the name! That, and thy repentance, may avail to take the scarlet letter off thy breast.”

“Never,” replied Hester Prynne, looking, not at Mr. Wilson, but into the deep and troubled eyes of the younger clergyman. “It is too deeply branded. Ye cannot take it off. And would that I might endure his agony as well as mine!”

“Speak, woman!” said another voice, coldly and sternly, proceeding from the crowd “Give your child a father!”

“I will not speak!” answered Hester, turning pale as death, but responding to this voice, which she too surely recognised. “And my child must seek a heavenly father; she shall never know an earthly one!”

“She will not speak!” murmured Mr. Dimmesdale, who, leaning over the balcony, with his hand upon his heart, had awaited the result of his appeal. He now drew back with a long respiration. “Wondrous strength and generosity of a woman’s heart! She will not speak!”

Discerning the impracticable state of the poor culprit’s mind, the elder clergyman, who had carefully prepared himself for the occasion, addressed to the multitude a discourse on sin, in all its branches, but with continual reference to the ignominious letter. So forcibly did he dwell upon this symbol that it assumed new terrors, and seemed to derive its scarlet hue from the flames of the infernal pit. Hester Prynne, meanwhile, kept her place upon the pedestal of shame, with glazed eyes, and an air of weary indifference. She had borne that morning all that nature could endure; and as her temperament was not of the order that escapes from too intense suffering by a swoon, her spirit could only shelter itself beneath a stony crust of insensibility. With the same hard demeanour, she was led back to prison, and vanished from the public gaze within its iron-clamped portal. It was whispered by those who peered after her that the scarlet letter threw a lurid gleam along the dark passage-way of the interior.



## IV

### The Interview

After her return to the prison, Hester Prynne was found to be in a state of nervous excitement, that demanded constant watchfulness, lest she should perpetrate violence on herself, or do some half-frenzied mischief to the poor babe. As night approached, it proving impossible to quell her insubordination by rebuke or threats of punishment, Master Brackett, the jailer, thought fit to introduce a physician. He described him as a man of skill in all Christian modes of physical science, and likewise familiar with whatever the savage people could teach in respect to medicinal herbs and roots that grew in the forest. There was much need of professional assistance, not merely for Hester, but still more urgently for the child – who, drawing its sustenance from the maternal bosom, seemed to have drunk in with it all mother's despair. It now writhed in convulsions of pain, and was a forcible type of the moral agony which Hester Prynne had borne throughout the day.

Closely following the jailer appeared that individual, whose presence in the crowd had been of such deep interest to the wearer of the scarlet letter. He was lodged in the prison as the most convenient and suitable mode of disposing of him, until the magistrates should have conferred with the Indian sagamores respecting his ransom. His name was announced as Roger Chillingworth. The jailer, after ushering him into the room, remained a moment, marvelling at the comparative quiet that followed his entrance; for Hester Prynne had immediately become as still as death, although the child continued to moan.

"Prithee, friend, leave me alone with my patient," said the practitioner. "Trust me, good jailer, Mistress Prynne shall hereafter be more amenable to just authority than you may have found her heretofore."

The stranger had entered the room with the characteristic quietude of the profession to which he announced himself as belonging. Nor did his demeanour change when the withdrawal of the prison keeper left him face to face with the woman. His first care was given to the child, whose cries, indeed, made it of peremptory necessity to postpone all other business to the task of soothing her. He examined the infant carefully, and then proceeded to unclasp a leathern case, which he took from beneath his dress. It appeared to contain medical preparations, one of which he mingled with a cup of water.

"My old studies in alchemy," observed he, "and my sojourn, for above a year past, among a people well versed in the kindly properties of simples, have made a better physician of me than many that claim the medical degree. Here, woman! The child is yours, administer this draught, therefore, with thine<sup>7</sup> own hand."

Hester repelled the offered medicine, gazing with strongly marked apprehension into his face. "Wouldst thou avenge thyself on the innocent babe?" whispered she.

"Foolish woman!" responded the physician, half coldly, half soothingly. "What should ail me to harm this misbegotten and miserable babe? The medicine is potent for good, and were it my child as well as thine! I could do no better for it."

As she still hesitated, he took the infant in his arms, and himself administered the draught. It soon proved its efficacy, and redeemed the leech's pledge. The moans of the little patient subsided; its convulsive tossings gradually ceased; and in a few moments it sank into a profound and dewy slumber. The physician next bestowed his attention on the mother. With calm and intent scrutiny, he felt her pulse, looked into her eyes – a gaze that made her heart shrink and shudder, because

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<sup>7</sup> **thine** – твой, твои (употр. перед гласными вместо **thy**)

so familiar, and yet so strange and cold – and, finally, satisfied with his investigation, proceeded to mingle another draught.

“I have learned many new secrets in the wilderness, and here is one of them – a recipe that an Indian taught me, in requital of some lessons of my own, that were as old as Paracelsus<sup>8</sup>. Drink it! It may be less soothing than a sinless conscience, but it will calm the swell and heaving of thy passion.”

He presented the cup to Hester, who received it with a slow, earnest look into his face; not precisely a look of fear, yet full of doubt.

“I have thought of death,” said she – “have wished for it. Yet, if death be in this cup, I bid thee think again. See! It is even now at my lips.”

“Drink, then,” replied he, still with the same cold composure. “Dost thou know me so little, Hester Prynne? Even if I imagine a scheme of vengeance, what could I do better for my object than to let thee live so that this burning shame may still blaze upon thy bosom?” As he spoke, he laid his long fore-finger on the scarlet letter, which forthwith seemed to scorch into Hester’s breast, as if it had been red hot. He noticed her involuntary gesture, and smiled. “Live, therefore, and bear about thy doom with thee! And, that thou mayest live, take off this draught.”

Without further expostulation or delay, Hester Prynne drained the cup, and, at the motion of the man of skill, seated herself on the bed, where the child was sleeping; while he drew the chair and took his own seat beside her. She could not but tremble at these preparations; for she felt that – having now done all that humanity, he was next to treat with her as the man whom she had most deeply and irreparably injured.

“Hester,” said he, “I ask not how thou hast ascended to the pedestal of infamy on which I found thee. The reason is not far to seek. It was my folly, and thy weakness. I – the book-worm of great libraries – a man already in decay – what had I to do with youth and beauty like thine own? Misshapen from my birth-hour, how could I delude myself with the idea that intellectual gifts might veil physical deformity in a young girl’s fantasy? Men call me wise. If sages were ever wise in their own behoof, I might have foreseen all this. From the moment when we came down the old church-steps together, a married pair, I might have beheld the bale-fire of that scarlet letter blazing at the end of our path!”

“Thou knowest<sup>9</sup>,” said Hester – for, depressed as she was, she could not endure this last quiet stab at the token of her shame – “thou knowest that I was frank with thee. I felt no love, nor feigned any.”

“True,” replied he. “It was my folly! But, up to that epoch of my life, I had lived in vain. The world had been so cheerless! My heart was a habitation large enough for many guests, but lonely and chill, and without a household fire. I longed to kindle one! And so, Hester, I drew thee into my heart, and sought to warm thee by the warmth which thy presence made there!”

“I have greatly wronged thee,” murmured Hester.

“We have wronged each other,” answered he. “Mine was the first wrong, when I betrayed thy budding youth into a false and unnatural relation with my decay. Therefore, I seek no vengeance, plot no evil against thee. But, Hester, the man lives who has wronged us both! Who is he?”

“Ask me not!” replied Hester Prynne, looking firmly into his face. “That thou shalt never know!”

“Never, sayest thou?” rejoined he, with a smile of dark and self-relying intelligence. “Believe me, Hester, there are few things in the world hidden from the man who devotes himself earnestly and unreservedly to the solution of a mystery. Thou mayest cover up thy secret from the prying multitude. But I come to the inquest with other senses than they possess. I shall seek this man, as I have sought truth in books: as I have sought gold in alchemy. There is a sympathy that will make me conscious

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<sup>8</sup> **Paracelsus** – Парацельс (1493–1541), знаменитый врач, философ, естествоиспытатель, алхимик

<sup>9</sup> **know+est** (суффикс 2 л., ед. ч., наст. вр.) – (уст.) знаешь

of him. I shall see him tremble. I shall feel myself shudder, suddenly and unawares. Sooner or later, he must needs be mine.”

The eyes of the wrinkled scholar glowed so intensely upon her, that Hester Prynne clasped her hand over her heart, dreading lest he should read the secret there at once.

“He bears no letter of infamy wrought into his garment, as thou dost, but I shall read it on his heart. Yet fear not for him! Think not that I shall interfere with Heaven’s own method of retribution, or, to my own loss, betray him to the gripe of human law. Neither shall I contrive aught against his life; no, nor against his fame, if as I judge, he be a man of fair repute. Let him live! Let him hide himself in outward honour, if he may! Not the less he shall be mine!”

“One thing, thou that wast my wife, I would enjoin upon thee,” continued the scholar. “Thou hast kept the secret of thy paramour. Keep, likewise, mine! Breathe not to any human soul that thou didst ever call me husband! Here, on this wild outskirts of the earth, I shall pitch my tent; for, I find here a woman, a man, a child, amongst whom and myself there exist the closest ligaments. No matter whether of love or hate! Thou and thine, Hester Prynne, belong to me. My home is where thou art and where he is. But betray me not!”

“Wherefore dost thou desire it?” inquired Hester, shrinking, from this secret bond.

“It may be,” he replied, “because I will not encounter the dishonour that besmirches the husband of a faithless woman. It may be for other reasons. Let, therefore, thy husband be to the world as one already dead. Recognise me not, by word, by sign, by look! Breathe not the secret, above all, to the man thou wottest<sup>10</sup> of. Shouldst thou fail me in this, his fame, his position, his life will be in my hands. Beware!”

“I will keep thy secret, as I have his,” said Hester.

“Swear it!” rejoined he.

And she took the oath.

“And now, Mistress Prynne,” said old Roger Chillingworth, “I leave thee alone: alone with thy infant and the scarlet letter! How is it, Hester? Doth thy sentence bind thee to wear the token in thy sleep? Art thou not afraid of nightmares?”

“Why dost thou smile so at me?” inquired Hester, troubled at the expression of his eyes. “Art thou like the Black Man<sup>11</sup> that haunts the forest round about us? Hast thou enticed me into a bond that will prove the ruin of my soul?”

“Not thy soul,” he answered, with another smile. “No, not thine!”

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<sup>10</sup> **wottest** – (уст.) ведаешь, знаешь

<sup>11</sup> **the Black Man** – дьявол

## V

### Hester at Her Needle

Hester Prynne's term of confinement was now at an end. Her prison-door was thrown open, and she came forth into the sunshine, which seemed to her as if meant for no other purpose than to reveal the scarlet letter on her breast. Perhaps there was a more real torture in her first unattended footsteps from the threshold of the prison than even in the procession and spectacle that have been described. Then, she was supported by an unnatural tension of the nerves, and by all the combative energy of her character, which enabled her to convert the scene into a kind of lurid triumph. It was, moreover, a separate event, to meet which she might call up the vital strength that would have sufficed for many quiet years. But now, with this unattended walk from her prison door, began the daily custom. She could no longer borrow from the future to help her through the present grief. Tomorrow would bring its own trial with it, so would the next day. The accumulating days and added years would pile up their misery upon the heap of shame. Throughout them all, giving up her individuality, she would become the general symbol at which the preacher and moralist might point. Thus the young and pure would be taught to look at her, with the scarlet letter flaming on her breast – at her, the child of honourable parents – at her, the mother of a babe that would hereafter be a woman – at her, who had once been innocent – as the figure, the body, the reality of sin. And over her grave, the infamy that she must carry thither would be her only monument.

It may seem marvellous that, with the world before her – free to return to her birth-place, or to any other European land, and there hide her character and identity under a new exterior, – and having also the passes of the dark, inscrutable forest open to her, where the wildness of her nature might assimilate itself with a people whose customs and life were alien from the law that had condemned her – it may seem marvellous that this woman should still call that place her home, where, and where only, she must needs be the type of shame. But there is a fatality, which almost invariably compels human beings to linger around and haunt, ghost-like, the spot where some great and marked event has given the colour to their lifetime. Her sin, her ignominy, were the roots which she had struck into the soil. The chain that bound her here was of iron links, and galling to her inmost soul, but could never be broken.

It might be, too – doubtless it was so, although she hid the secret from herself – that another feeling kept her within the scene that had been so fatal. There trode, the feet of one with whom she deemed herself connected in a union that, unrecognised on earth, would bring them together before the bar of final judgment, and make that their marriage-altar, for a joint futurity of endless retribution. What she compelled herself to believe was half a truth, and half a self-delusion. Here, she said to herself had been the scene of her guilt, and here should be the scene of her earthly punishment.

Hester Prynne, therefore, did not flee. On the outskirts of the town, within the verge of the peninsula, but not in close vicinity to any other habitation, there was a small thatched cottage. It had been built by an earlier settler, and abandoned, because the soil about it was too sterile for cultivation. It stood on the shore, looking across a basin of the sea at the forest-covered hills. In this little lonesome dwelling, with some slender means that she possessed, and by the licence of the magistrates, who still kept an inquisitorial watch over her, Hester established herself, with her infant child. A mystic shadow of suspicion immediately attached itself to the spot. Children, too young to comprehend wherefore this woman should be shut out from the sphere of human charities, would creep nigh enough to behold her plying her needle at the cottage-window or labouring in her little garden, or coming forth along the pathway that led townward, and, discerning the scarlet letter on her breast, would scamper off with a strange contagious fear.

Lonely as was Hester's situation, she, however, incurred no risk of want. She possessed an art that sufficed to supply food for her thriving infant and herself. It was the art of needle-work. She bore on her breast, in the curiously embroidered letter, a specimen of her delicate and imaginative skill.

Here, indeed, in the sable simplicity that generally characterised the Puritanic modes of dress, there might be an infrequent call for the finer productions of her handiwork. Yet the taste of the age did not fail to extend its influence over our stern progenitors, who had cast behind them so many fashions which it might seem harder to dispense with.

Public ceremonies were marked by a sombre, but yet a studied magnificence. Deep ruffs, painfully wrought bands, and gorgeously embroidered gloves, were all deemed necessary to the official state of men assuming the reins of power, and were readily allowed to individuals dignified by rank or wealth, even while sumptuary laws forbade these and similar extravagances to the plebeian order. In the array of funerals, too there was a frequent and characteristic demand for such labour as Hester Prynne could supply. Baby-linen afforded still another possibility of toil and emolument.

By degrees, not very slowly, her handiwork became what would now be termed the fashion. Whether from commiseration for a woman of so miserable a destiny; or from the morbid curiosity that gives a fictitious value even to common or worthless things; or because Hester really filled a gap which must otherwise have remained vacant; it is certain that she had ready and fairly requited employment for as many hours as she saw fit to occupy with her needle.

Hester sought not to acquire anything beyond a subsistence, of the plainest and most ascetic description. Her own dress was of the coarsest materials and the most sombre hue, with only that one ornament – the scarlet letter – which it was her doom to wear. The child's attire, on the other hand, was distinguished by a fanciful, or, we may rather say, a fantastic ingenuity, which served, indeed, to heighten the airy charm that early began to develop itself in the little girl, but which appeared to have also a deeper meaning. We may speak further of it hereafter. Except for that small expenditure in the decoration of her infant, Hester bestowed all her superfluous means in charity, on wretches less miserable than herself, and who not unfrequently insulted the hand that fed them. Much of the time she employed in making coarse garments for the poor. It is probable that there was an idea of penance in devoting so many hours to such rude handiwork. She had in her nature a taste for the gorgeously beautiful, which, save in the exquisite productions of her needle, found nothing else to exercise itself upon. Women derive a pleasure, from the delicate toil of the needle. To Hester Prynne it might have been a mode of expressing, and therefore soothing, the passion of her life. Like all other joys, she rejected it as sin. This morbid meddling of conscience with an immaterial matter betokened, it is to be feared, no genuine and steadfast penitence, but something doubtful, something that might be deeply wrong beneath.

In this manner, Hester Prynne came to have a part to perform in the world. In all her intercourse with society, however, there was nothing that made her feel as if she belonged to it. Every gesture, every word, and even the silence of those with whom she came in contact, implied, and often expressed, that she was banished, and as much alone as if she inhabited another sphere. It was not an age of delicacy; and her position, although she understood it well, and was in little danger of forgetting it, was often brought before her vivid self-perception, like a new anguish, by the rudest touch upon the tenderest spot. The poor often reviled the hand that was stretched forth to succour them. Dames of elevated rank, whose doors she entered in the way of her occupation, were accustomed to distil drops of bitterness into her heart. Hester had schooled herself long and well; and she never responded to these attacks, save by a flush of crimson that rose irrepressibly over her pale cheek. She was patient – a martyr, indeed but she forebore to pray for enemies, lest, in spite of her forgiving aspirations, the words of the blessing should stubbornly twist themselves into a curse.

Continually, and in a thousand other ways, did she feel the innumerable throbs of anguish that had been so cunningly contrived for her by the undying, the ever-active sentence of the Puritan tribunal. Clergymen paused in the streets, to address words of exhortation. If she entered a church,

trusting to share the Sabbath smile of the Universal Father, it was often her mishap to find herself the text of the discourse. She grew to have a dread of children; for they had imbibed from their parents a vague idea of something horrible in this dreary woman gliding silently through the town, with never any companion but one only child. Therefore they pursued her at a distance with shrill cries, and the utterances of a word that had no distinct purport to their own minds, but was none the less terrible to her. Another peculiar torture was felt in the gaze of a new eye. When strangers looked curiously at the scarlet letter they branded it afresh in Hester's soul. But then, again, an accustomed eye had likewise its own anguish to inflict. Its cool stare of familiarity was intolerable.

But sometimes, once in many days, or perchance in many months, she felt an eye – a human eye – upon the ignominious brand, that seemed to give a momentary relief, as if half of her agony were shared. The next instant, back it all rushed again, with still a deeper throb of pain; for, in that brief interval, she had sinned anew. (Had Hester sinned alone?)

Her imagination was somewhat affected by the strange and solitary anguish of her life. Walking to and fro, with those lonely footsteps she felt that the scarlet letter had endowed her with a new sense. She shuddered to believe, yet could not help believing, that it gave her a sympathetic knowledge of the hidden sin in other hearts. She was terror-stricken by the revelations that were thus made. What were they? Could they be other than the insidious whispers of the bad angel that the outward guise of purity was but a lie, and that, if truth were everywhere to be shown, a scarlet letter would blaze forth on many a bosom besides Hester Prynne's? Or, must she receive those intimations – so obscure, yet so distinct – as truth? In all her miserable experience, there was nothing else so awful and so loathsome as this sense. Sometimes the red infamy upon her breast would give a sympathetic throb, as she passed near a venerable minister or magistrate, the model of piety and justice. A mystic sisterhood would contumaciously assert itself, as she met the sanctified frown of some matron, who, according to the rumour of all tongues, had kept cold snow within her bosom throughout life. Or, once more, the electric thrill would give her warning and, looking up, she would detect the eyes of a young maiden glancing at the scarlet letter, shyly, with a faint, chill crimson in her cheeks as if her purity were somewhat sullied by that momentary glance. O Fiend, wouldst thou leave nothing, whether in youth or age, for this poor sinner to revere? – such loss of faith is ever one of the saddest results of sin. Be it accepted as a proof that all was not corrupt in this poor victim of her own frailty, and man's hard law, that Hester Prynne yet struggled to believe that no fellow-mortal was guilty like herself.

The vulgar had a story that the symbol was not mere scarlet cloth, tinged in an earthly dye-pot, but was red-hot with infernal fire, and could be seen glowing all alight whenever Hester Prynne walked abroad in the night-time. And we must needs say it seared Hester's bosom so deeply, that perhaps there was more truth in the rumour than our modern incredulity may be inclined to admit.



## VI

### Pearl

We have as yet hardly spoken of the infant; that little creature, whose innocent life had sprung out of the rank luxuriance of a guilty passion. How strange it seemed to the sad woman, as she watched the growth, and the beauty that became every day more brilliant, and the intelligence that threw its quivering sunshine over the tiny features of this child! Her Pearl – for so had Hester called her – as being of great price – purchased with all she had – her mother's only treasure! How strange, indeed! Man had marked this woman's sin by a scarlet letter. God, as a direct consequence of the sin which man thus punished, had given her a lovely child! Yet these thoughts affected Hester Prynne less with hope than apprehension. She knew that her deed had been evil; she could have no faith, therefore, that its result would be good. Day after day she looked fearfully into the child's expanding nature, ever dreading to detect some dark and wild peculiarity that should correspond with the guiltiness to which she owed her being.

Certainly there was no physical defect. By its perfect shape, its vigour, and its natural dexterity in the use of all its untried limbs, the infant was worthy to have been brought forth in Eden. The child had a native grace which does not invariably co-exist with faultless beauty. Her mother, with a morbid purpose that may be better understood hereafter, had bought the richest tissues that could be procured, and allowed her imaginative faculty its full play in the arrangement and decoration of the dresses which the child wore before the public eye. So magnificent was the small figure when thus arrayed, and such was the splendour of Pearl's own proper beauty that there was an absolute circle of radiance around her. And yet a russet gown, torn and soiled with the child's rude play, made a picture of her just as perfect. Pearl's aspect was imbued with a spell of infinite variety, comprehending the full scope between the wild-flower prettiness of a peasant-baby, and the pomp of an infant princess. Throughout all, however, there was a trait of passion, a certain depth of hue, which she never lost.

This outward mutability indicated the various properties of her inner life. Her nature appeared to possess depth, too, as well as variety. But the child could not be made amenable to rules. In giving her existence a great law had been broken; and the result was a being whose elements were perhaps beautiful and brilliant, but all in disorder. Hester could only account for the child's character by recalling what she herself had been during that momentous period while Pearl was imbibing her soul from the spiritual world. The mother's impassioned state had been the medium through which were transmitted to the unborn infant the rays of its moral life; and, however white and clear originally, they had taken the deep stains of crimson and gold, the fiery lustre, the black shadow, and the untempered light of the intervening substance. Above all, the warfare of Hester's spirit at that epoch was perpetuated in Pearl.

Mindful of her own errors and misfortunes, Hester Prynne early sought to impose a tender but strict control over the infant immortality that was committed to her charge. But the task was beyond her skill. After testing both smiles and frowns, and proving that neither mode of treatment possessed any calculable influence, Hester was ultimately compelled to stand aside and permit the child to be swayed by her own impulses. Her mother, while Pearl was yet an infant, grew acquainted with a certain peculiar look, that warned her when it would be labour thrown away to insist, persuade or plead.

It was a look so intelligent, yet inexplicable, perverse, sometimes so malicious, but generally accompanied by a wild flow of spirits, that Hester could not help questioning at such moments whether Pearl was a human child. She seemed rather an airy sprite, which, after playing its fantastic sports for a little while upon the cottage floor, would flit away with a mocking smile. Beholding it, Hester was constrained to rush towards the child to snatch her to her bosom with a close pressure and earnest kisses to assure herself that Pearl was flesh and blood, and not utterly delusive.

Heart-smitten at this bewildering and baffling spell, that so often came between herself and her sole treasure, who was all her world, Hester sometimes burst into passionate tears. Then, Pearl would frown, and clench her little fist, and harden her small features into a stern, unsympathising look of discontent. Not seldom she would laugh like a thing incapable and unintelligent of human sorrow. Or, rarely, she would be convulsed with rage of grief and sob out her love for her mother in broken words. Brooding over all these matters, the mother felt like one who has evoked a spirit, but has failed to win the master-word that should control this new and incomprehensible intelligence. Her only real comfort was when the child lay in the placidity of sleep. Then she was sure of her, and tasted hours of quiet, sad, delicious happiness; until little Pearl awoke!

How soon indeed did Pearl arrive at an age that was capable of social intercourse beyond the mother's ever-ready smile and nonsense-words! What a happiness would it have been could Hester Prynne have heard her clear, bird-like voice mingling with the uproar of other childish voices. But this could never be. Pearl was a born outcast of the infantile world. An imp of evil, emblem and product of sin, she had no right among christened infants. Nothing was more remarkable than the instinct with which the child comprehended her loneliness, the whole peculiarity of her position in respect to other children. Never since her release from prison had Hester met the public gaze without her. In all her walks about the town, Pearl, too, was there: first as the babe in arms, and afterwards as the little girl tripping along at the rate of three footsteps to one of Hester's. She saw the children of the settlement disporting themselves in such grim fashions as the Puritanic nurture would permit; playing at going to church, perchance, or at scourging Quakers, or taking scalps in a sham fight with the Indians, or scaring one another with freaks of imitative witchcraft. Pearl gazed intently, but never sought to make acquaintance. If spoken to, she would not speak again. If the children gathered about her, Pearl would grow positively terrible in her puny wrath, snatching up stones to fling at them, with shrill, incoherent exclamations, that had so much the sound of a witch's anathemas in some unknown tongue.

These outbreaks of a fierce temper had a kind of value for the mother; because there was at least an intelligible earnestness in the mood, instead of the fitful caprice that so often thwarted her in the child's manifestations. It appalled her, nevertheless, to discern here, again, a shadowy reflection of the evil that had existed in herself. All this enmity and passion had Pearl inherited out of Hester's heart.

At home Pearl wanted not a wide circle of acquaintance. The spell of life went forth from her ever-creative spirit, and communicated itself to a thousand objects. The unlikely materials without undergoing any outward change, became spiritually adapted to whatever drama occupied the stage of her inner world. The pine-trees, aged, black and flinging groans, needed little transformation to figure as Puritan elders; the ugliest weeds of the garden were their children, whom Pearl smote down and uprooted most unmercifully. It was wonderful, the vast variety of forms into which she threw her intellect, with no continuity, indeed, but always in a state of preternatural activity. The singularity lay in the hostile feelings with which the child regarded all these offsprings of her own heart and mind. She never created a friend, but armed enemies, against whom she rushed to battle. It was inexpressibly sad to observe, in one so young, this constant recognition of an adverse world, and so fierce a training of the energies that were to make good her cause in the contest that must ensue.

One peculiarity of the child's deportment remains yet to be told. The very first object of which Pearl seemed to become aware was the scarlet letter on Hester's bosom! One day, as her mother stooped over the cradle, the infant's eyes had been caught by the glimmering of the gold embroidery about the letter; and putting up her little hand she grasped at it, smiling, not doubtfully, but with a decided gleam. Then, gasping for breath, did Hester Prynne clutch the token, instinctively endeavouring to tear it away, so infinite was the torture inflicted by the intelligent touch of baby-hand. Again, as if her mother's agonised gesture were meant only to make sport for her, did little Pearl look into her eyes, and smile. From that epoch Hester had never felt a moment's safety. Weeks, it is true, would sometimes elapse, during which Pearl's gaze might never once be fixed upon the

scarlet letter; but then, again, it would come at unawares and always with that peculiar smile and odd expression of the eyes.

Once while Hester was looking at her own image in them, as mothers are fond of doing; suddenly she fancied that she beheld, not her own miniature portrait, but another face in the small black mirror of Pearl's eye. It was a face, fiend-like, full of smiling malice, yet bearing the semblance of features that she had known full well, though seldom with a smile, and never with malice in them. It was as if an evil spirit possessed the child, and had just then peeped forth in mockery. Many a time afterwards had Hester been tortured, though less vividly, by the same illusion.

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