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THE SCARLET LETTER.

By NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE.

CHAPTER III. 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. To say the truth, there was much need of professional assistance, not merely for Hester herself, but still more urgently for the child; who, drawing its sustenance from the maternal bosom, seemed to have drunk in with it all the turmoil, the anguish and despair which pervaded the mother's system. It now writhed in convulsions of pain, and was a forcible type, in its little frame, of the moral agony, which Hester Prynne had borne through-out the day.

Closely following the jailer into the dismal apartment appeared that individual of singular aspect whose presence in the crowd had been of such deep interest to the wearer of the scarlet letter. He was lodged in the prison, not as suspected of any offense, but 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, marveling at the comparative quiet that followed his entrance; for Hester Prynne had immediately become as still as death, although the child continued to moan.

"Prithco, friend, leave me alone with my patient," said the practitioner. "Trust me, good jailer, you shall hereafter have peace in your hours, and I promise you Mistress Prynne shall hereafter be more amenable to just authority than you may have found her heretofore." "Nay, if your worship can accomplish that," answered Master Brackett, "I shall own you for a man of skill indeed! Verily, the woman hath been like a possessed one, and there lacks little that I should take in hand to drive Satan out of her with stripes." The stranger had entered the room with the characteristic quietude of the profession to which he announced himself as belonging. Nor did his demeanor change when the withdrawal of the prison keeper left him face to face with the woman, whose absorbed notice of him in the crowd had intimated so close a relation between himself and her. His first care was given to the child, whose cries, indeed, as she lay writhing on the trundle-bed, 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 leather 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, she is none of mine, neither will she recognize my voice or aspect as a father's. Administer this draft, therefore, with thine own hand." Hester repelled the offered medicine, at the same time 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 all me, to harm this misbegotten and miserable babe? The medicine is potent for good; and were it not for my child's mine own, as well as thine—I could do no better for it." As she still hesitated, being, in fact, in no reasonable state of mind, he took the infant in his arms and himself administered the draft. 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, as in the custom of young children after relief from pain, it sank into a profound and dewy slumber. The physician, as he had a fair right to be termed, 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 so familiar and yet so strange and cold—and finally, satisfied with his investigation, proceeded to mingle another draft.

"I know not Letho nor Nepenthe," remarked he, "but 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. Drink it! It may be less soothing than a sinless conscience. That I cannot give thee. But it will calm the swell and heaving of thy passion, like oil thrown on the waves of tempestuous sea." 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 and questioning as to what his purposes might be. She looked also at her slumbering child. "I have thought of death," said she—"have wished for it—would even have prayed for it were it fit that such as I should pray for anything. Yet if death be in this cup I had thee think again ere thou beholdest me quaff it. 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? Are my purposes wont to be so shallow? Even if I imagine a scheme of vengeance what could I do better for my object than to let thee live—than to give thee medicines against all harm and peril of life—so that this burning shame may still blaze upon thy bosom?" As he spoke he laid his long forefinger 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, in the eyes of men and women—in the eyes of him whom thou didst call thy husband—in the eyes of yonder child! And, that thou mayest live, take off this draft."

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 only chair which the room afforded 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 or principle, or if so it were, a refined cruelty, impelled him to do, for the relief of physical suffering—he was next to treat with her as the man whom she had most deeply and irreparably injured.

"Hester," said he, "I ask not wherefore nor how thou hast fallen into this pit or eye, rather, 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, a man of thought, the bookworm of great libraries, a man already in decay, having given my best years to feed the hungry dream of knowledge, what had I to do with youth and beauty like thine own? 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 sagos were ever wise in their own behalf I might have foreseen all this. I might have known that as I came out of the vast and dismal forest and entered this settlement of Christian men the very first object that met my eye would be thyself, Hester Prynne, standing up, a statue of ignominy, before the people. Nay, from the moment when we came down the old church steps together, a married pair, I might have beheld the baldrac of that scarlet letter blazing at the end of our path!"

"Thou knowest," said Hester—for, depressed as she was, she could not endure this last quaff of the bitter draught—"thou knowest that I was frank with thee. I felt no love, nor feigned any."

"True," replied he. "It was my folly! I have said it. 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 for one old as I was, and somber as I was, and misshapen as I was—that the simple bliss, which is scattered far and wide for all mankind to gather up, might yet be mine. And so, Hester, I drew thee into my heart, into its innermost chamber, and sought to warm thee by the warmth which thy presence made there."

"I have greatly wronged thee," murmured Hester, "and thou knowest that I was frank with thee. I felt no love, nor feigned any."

"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, as a man who had not thought and philosophized in vain, I seek no vengeance, plot no evil against thee. Between thee and me the scale hangs fairly balanced. 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. "Never know him? Believe me, Hester, there are few things—whether in the outward world or, to a certain depth, in the invisible sphere of thought—few things 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. Thou mayest conceal it, too, from the ministers and magistrates, even as thou didst this day, when they sought to wrench the name out of thy heart and give thee a partner on thy pedestal. But, as for me, 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 of him. I shall see him tremble. I shall feel myself shudder, suddenly and unawares. Sooner or later, he must needs be unroofed!"

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

"Thou wilt not reveal his name? Not the loss he is mine," resumed he, with a look of confidence, as if destiny were at one with him. "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 do thou imagine that I shall 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 honor, if he may! Not the less he must be mine!" "Thy acts are like mercy," said Hester, bewildered and appalled. "But thy words interpret thee as a terror!" "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! There are none in this land that know me. 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, elsewhere a wanderer and isolated from human interests, I find here a woman, a man, a child, among whom and myself there exist the closest ligaments. No matter whether of love or hate; no matter whether of right or wrong! 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, she hardly knew why, from this secret bond. "Why not announce thyself openly, and cast me off at once?"

"It may be," he replied, "because I will not encounter the dishonor that besmirches the husband of a faithless woman. It may be for other reasons. Enough, it is my purpose to live and die unknown. Let, therefore, thy husband be to the world as one already dead, and of whom no tidings shall ever come. Recognize me not by word, by sign, by look! Breathe not the secret, above all, to the man thou wottest of. Shouldst thou fail me in this, beware! 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, as he was heretofore to be named, "I leave thee alone with the man who has the scarlet letter! How is it, Hester? Dost thou sentence him to wear the token in thy sleep? Art thou not afraid of nightmares and hideous dreams?"

"Why dost thou smile so at me?" inquired Hester, troubled at the expression of his eyes. "Art thou like the Black Man that haunts the forest round about here? He is a man of evil, and he would that will prey the ruin of my soul!"

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

CHAPTER IV. 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, falling on all alike, seemed to her sick and morbid heart as most 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, where she was made the common infamy, at which all mankind was summoned to point its finger. Then she was separated by an unnatural tension of the nerves and by all the collective energy of her character, which enabled her to convert the scene into a kind of lurid triumph.

It was, moreover, a separate and insulated event, to occur but once in her lifetime, and to meet which, therefore, reckless of economy, she might call on the vital strength that would have sufficed for many quiet years. The very law that condemned her—a giant of stern features, but with vigor to support, as well as to annihilate, in his iron arm—had held her up, through the terrible ordeal of her ignominy. But now, with this unattended walk from her prison door, began the daily custom; and she must either sustain and carry it forward by the ordinary resources of her nature or sink beneath it. 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, and so would the next; each its own trial, and yet the very same that was now so unutterably grievous to be borne.

The days of the far-off future would toll onward, still with the same burden for her to take up and bear along with her, but never to fling down, for 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 and in which they might vivify and embody their images of woman's frailty and sinful passion. Thus, as years rolled on, she would be taught to look at her, with the scarlet letter flaming on her breast—at her, the child of honorable 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, that with the world before her—kept by no restrictive clause of her condemnation within the limits of the Puritan settlement, so remote and so obscure—free to return to her birthplace or to any other European land, and there hide her character and identity under a new exterior, as completely as if emerging into another state of being, and having also the power 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, a feeling so irresistible and inevitable that it has the force of doom, which all most invariably compels human beings to linger around and haunt, ghostlike, the spot where some great and marked event has given the color to their lifetime, and still the more irresistibly, the darker the tinge that saddens it.

Her sin, her ignominy, were the roots which she had struck into the soil. It was as if a new birth, with stronger assimilation than the first, had converted the forest land, still so congenial to every other pilgrim and wanderer, into Hester Prynne's wild and dreary but lifelong home. All other scenes of earth—even that village of rural England, where happy infancy and stainless maidenhood seemed yet to be in her mother's keeping, like garments put off long ago—were forgotten to her in comparison. 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 and grew pale whenever it struggled out of her heart, like a serpent from its hole—it might be that another feeling kept her within the scene and pathway that had been so fatal. There, dwelt, there trod the feet of one with whom she deemed herself connected in a union that, unrecognized 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. Over and over again the tempter of souls had thrust this idea upon Hester's contemplation, and laughed at the passionate and desperate joy with which she seized and then strove to cast it from her. She barely looked the idea in the face and

fastened to her in its dungeon. What she compelled herself to believe—what finally she reasoned upon as her motive for continuing a resident of New England—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; and so, perchance, the torture of her daily shame would at length purge her soul and work out another purity than that which she had lost—more saintlike, because the result of martyrdom.

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, while its comparative remoteness put it out of the sphere of that social activity which already marked the habits of the emigrants. It stood on the shore looking across a hill, toward the west. A clump of scrubby trees, such as alone grew on the peninsula, did not so much conceal the cottage from view, as seem to denote that here was some object which would have been seen, or at least ought to be, concealed. In this little, lonesome dwelling, with some slender means that she possessed, and by the license 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 set out from the sphere of human charities, would creep nigh enough to behold her plying her needle at the cottage window, or standing in the doorway, or laboring in her little garden, or coming forth along the pathway that led toward and, discerning the scarlet letter on her breast, would scamper off with a strange, contagious fear.

Lonely as was Hester's situation, and without a friend on earth who dared to show himself, she, however, incurred no risk of want. She possessed an art that sufficed, even in a land that afforded comparatively little scope for its exercise, to supply food for her thriving infant and herself. It was the art—then as now almost the only one within a woman's grasp—of needlework. She bore on her breast, in the curiously embroidered letter, a specimen of her delicate and imaginative skill, of which the dames of a court might gladly have availed themselves to add the richer and more spiritual adornment of human ingenuity to their fabrics of silk and gold.

THE DELAWARE PEACHES GONE.

It is the general opinion of the peach growers that not more than one-twentieth of a crop will be marketed from Delaware this year, while the crop of last year was over 4,000 carloads. The prospect for at least half a crop was predicted in the early spring, but it has dwindled down to nearly nothing. The frosts and cold rains damaged the peaches so badly that most all fell to the ground during the June crop.

MR. JOHN CARPENTER, OF GOODLAND IND., SAYS:

"I tried Chamberlain's Colic, Cholera and Diarrhoea Remedy, for diarrhoea and severe cramps and pains in the stomach and bowels with the best results. In the worst cases I never had to give more than the third dose to effect a cure. In most cases one dose will do. Besides its other good qualities it is pleasant to take." 25 and 50 cent bottles for sale by A. R. Fisher.

BEACH FORK.

Health of the community good. Everything looks prosperous since the late showers. The Sunday-school is still in a prosperous condition. Miss Annie Patterson has returned home after a visit of several days on Long Lick. Mr. Eskridge, of Hardinsburg, came down one night last week and found the Harrison & Reid club for the boys. The Democrats will organize a Cleveland & Stevenson club at Mattingly some time this month. Hurrah for Cleveland. Uncle Nat Brickly starts this week for Virginia to pay his old home a visit. He says he will have one more old-fashioned deer and bear hunt while there. Uncle Bill wanted to go to the Harrison & Reid club, but he said he had to carry in the churn of milk and hurt his back and could not go. Never mind, Uncle, we will find it again. It is a fixed and immutable law that to have good, sound health one must have pure, rich and abundant blood. There is no shorter nor surer route than by a course of De Witt's Sarsaparilla—Sold by Short & Haynes, Cloverport, and Beard & Beeler, Hardinsburg.

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He's Been Down Here Raising Sheol For Two Weeks.

Arthur Board, "that had travelin' man from Louisville," as the barefooted belles of Eastern Kentucky call him, is said to be on the eve of organizing a natural gas company. He arrived in the city yesterday after a mysterious absence of several weeks, ostensibly for the purpose of selling socks, etc. He was dusty and tired-looking when he blew into the Waverly Hotel, and his lynx-like eyes shot mysterious glances. The natural gas rumor could not be confirmed, however. "I'll wager that many a maiden heart, in sylvan shades, by babbling streamlets, is now mourning the absence of Arthur, the hairless idol.—Town Talk in Louisville Commercial.

A Relationship Problem

Two ladies out walking met a gentleman; he raised his hat to one, and the other said: "Do you know that gentleman?" The other lady replied his mother was my mother's only child. The publishers of the LADIES' PICTORIAL WEEKLY will give an elegant CUCKER-ING PIANO, valued at five hundred dollars, to the first person telling the relationship between the gentleman and lady speaking last. An elegant suite of PARLOR FURNITURE, valued at two hundred dollars, will be given for the second correct answer. Ten elegant GOLD WATCHES (good movement) will be given for each of the next ten correct answers and a VALUABLE PRIZE will be given to EVERY PERSON that answers this problem correctly. We are publishing the very best and handsomest Ladies' Weekly publication for the price on the two continents, it equals all the high priced weekly publications, and our object in awarding these prizes is to introduce it into new homes and make permanent subscribers. We guarantee that every person answering this problem correctly will receive a valuable prize that will enable us to secure their friends as subscribers. Every one answering must enclose one dollar for six months' trial subscription to the LADIES' PICTORIAL WEEKLY, which is published by a perfectly reliable firm. Prizes will be sent promptly and just as represented. Contestants should answer to-day as date of post-mark counts and this advertisement appears all over the country on the same day. Prizes will be sent free of custom's duty. Address LADIES' PICTORIAL WEEKLY, "H" Toronto, Canada.

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