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SF PERUSALS

THE SCARLET LETTER

by Phyllis Nagy

ADAPTED FROM THE NOVEL BY
Nathaniel Hawthorne

A Samuel French Acting Edition

SAMUEL FRENCH
FOUNDED 1830
New York Hollywood London Toronto
SAMUELFRENCH.COM

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ISBN 978-0-573-69529-2 Printed in U.S.A. #20976

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(Name of Producer)
Presents
THE SCARLET LETTER
by Phyllis Nagy (50%)
Adapted from the Novel by
Nathaniel Hawthorne (25%)

THE SCARLET LETTER was commissioned and produced by the Denver Center Theatre Company, Donovan Marley, Artistic Director. The first production opened March 21, 1994 with the following cast:

HESTER PRYNNE..... Jacqueline Antaramian
MASTER BRACKETT..... Michael Hartman
PEARL..... Sara Fernandez-K
MISTRESS HIBBINS..... Suzanne Bouchard
GOVERNOR BELLINGHAM..... Michael Santo
ARTHUR DIMMESDALE..... Sean Hennigan
ROGER CHILLINGWORTH..... Richard Risso

Directed by - Jamie Horton
Sets and Costumes by - Andrew V. Yelusich
Lighting by - Don Darnutzer

It subsequently opened in New York on October 11, 1994 in a production by the Classic Stage Company, David Esbjornson, Artistic Director with the following cast:

HESTER PRYNNE..... Cynthia Nixon
MASTER BRACKETT..... Dan Daily
PEARL..... Erin Cressida Wilson
MISTRESS HIBBINS..... Sheila Tousey
GOVERNOR BELLINGHAM..... Bill Cwikowski
ARTHUR DIMMESDALE..... Stephen Caffrey
ROGER CHILLINGWORTH..... Jon De Vries

Directed by - Lisa Peterson

THE CHARACTERS

Hester Prynne: A Stunning young seamstress who's a master of irony. She is neither sentimental nor self-pitying. Her defiant humor sees her through most situations. Late 20's.

Arthur Dimmesdale: A successful young minister who finds it difficult to trust anybody. Sexy and rather capable, though he doesn't think so. Late 20's.

Roger Chillingworth: A 50-something, humpbacked, would-be physician who's slipped into an early old age. Possessed of a dry and deadly wit.

Pearl: Hester's daughter, the most unusual child in the world. She must be played by an actress in her late 20's, who at no time attempts to play her as a child.

Governor Bellingham: Boston's Governor. Well-meaning but pompous.

Master Brackett: Boston's jailer. Kind, and the slightest bit slow on the uptake.

Mistress Hibbins: Boston's witch, and sister to Governor Bellingham. Just past 30, and maddeningly sexy.

TIME, PLACE AND SETTING

The events of The Scarlet Letter take place some 300 years ago, in Boston, Mass.

There are several set pieces which, at first glance, seem to bear no naturalistic relationship to each other, but which instead might appear to float together in the same space; an enormous prison doorway, the portal of which is surrounded by a wild rose bush; a balcony overlooking that doorway; a graveyard; and a large scaffold. Beyond these things and closing in on them is a vast expanse of wood--suffocating, threatening, infinite and completely dominating the environment.

It is always summer.

PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTE:

The scarlet letter itself should be a dazzling bit of costume. The scarlet letter is Hester's one luxurious accessory, and she wears it well. While she clothes herself quite austerely, she makes incredibly beautiful, indeed decadent, clothing for her daughter.

ACT I

(Lights up on the prison doorway. From the surrounding darkness, HESTER speaks.)

HESTER. I made it myself. There was no other way. I searched every shop in Boston to no avail. The scarlet letter could not be bought. So I started from scratch.

(Lights up on HESTER PRYNNE and BRACKETT behind the doorway. HESTER wears a simple dress and bonnet. Brackett tries to help HESTER fasten the scarlet letter to her bosom.)

HESTER. It took me quite some time to find the gold silk thread. Gold is precious and so I had to have it for my letter. If I am to keep nothing but the scarlet letter, it must be special.

(BRACKETT pricks himself.)

BRACKETT. Ouch. Christ. Sorry.

HESTER. You mustn't be so careful with it, Master Brackett. Let me show you. *(HESTER takes BRACKETT'S hand and guides it high up on her bosom.)* Fasten it here. I adore pretty things. Master Brackett?

BRACKETT. Mistress Prynne.

HESTER. Why do you hesitate?

BRACKETT. Isn't this improper?
HESTER. At the very least.

(BRACKETT drops the scarlet letter. HESTER laughs and begins to fasten the letter herself.)

HESTER. Do you know how costly gold silk thread is, Master Brackett?
BRACKETT. *(Shrugs.)* I'm a jailer.
HESTER. Take a guess. Humor me.
BRACKETT. I'm humorless.

(HESTER finishes fastening the scarlet letter.)

HESTER. I despise self-pity, Master Brackett.

(A bell strikes noon.)

BRACKETT. I mean you no harm, Mistress Prynne.
HESTER I asked you to help me affix my punishment. There is nothing improper in that.
BRACKETT. We should go.

(BRACKETT holds out his arm to HESTER. She doesn't take it.)

HESTER. Bring me my child.

(Lights up on PEARL. She seems to come forward, as she speaks, from the vast expanse of wood, right down to the edge of the scaffold.)

PEARL. My first three months are spent in that prison. Unlike my mother, I have no affection for pretty things. Nor do I care for our jailer, Master Brackett, who shudders every time he edges past my cradle. A nice man, though. But I don't like nice men. I like the woods.

(The bell continues to toll. HESTER and BRACKETT listen to it for several beats, then:)

HESTER. Are you married, Master Brackett?

BRACKETT. Thirty years.

HESTER. What is your wife's name?

BRACKETT. Charlotte. We met in Bristol. I was a milkman. She baked bread.

HESTER. And here we are in Boston. *(A beat.)* I lived in Amsterdam.

BRACKETT. I've always meant to see the canals.

HESTER. Yes. Well. You've missed nothing.

PEARL. I like the woods. Like the feel of the trees swaying dangerously above me, the threat of a sudden disaster. Hester courts punishment, but me, I crave catastrophe, the slightest hint of it. And today's my first treat.

BRACKETT. It's noon. Past noon.

HESTER. I know.

BRACKETT. Mistress Prynne, I am sorry.

HESTER. Is it nice in Bristol?

BRACKETT. I don't remember.

HESTER. You're sweating, Master Brackett. Your upper lip is very wet. *(Beat.)* Bring me my Pearl.

BRACKETT. They say if you expose an infant to crowds, it will grow to fear human contact.

HESTER. I'll take my chances.

PEARL. I love a woman who gambles even more than I love the woods. Master Brackett passes me to Hester as if I'm an infectious disease. And so I meet Boston.

(HESTER and BRACKETT cross the prison doorway's threshold. At no time should HESTER pretend to have a child in her arms, nor should BRACKETT mime bringing her a child. HESTER holds her hands over her chest, as if to hide the scarlet letter from view. PEARL reaches the edge of the scaffold. Lights up on the balcony to reveal GOVERNOR BELLINGHAM, ARTHUR DIMMESDALE and MISTRESS HIBBINS, who smiles and waves to an unseen crowd as if she is a very great dignitary.)

BELLINGHAM. Hester Prynne: Who is the child's father? Your silence is inexplicable.

HESTER. I will not name him.

BELLINGHAM: Hester Prynne: Look about you. The whole of Boston awaits your response. Do not disappoint us.

HESTER. I will not name him.

PEARL. It's a fine summer's day in the marketplace and the swell of people pressed close, so close to our scaffold, eager for humiliation, excites me. I look directly at the sun, having never before seen it. My eyes burn. I pinch Hester's breast.

(HESTER shudders, as if in response to the pinch.)

HIBBINS. *(To Bellingham.)* Look, brother. It's Cooper, the silversmith. And over there, that miserly butcher, Wright. I

never thought I'd see the day he closed shop for a—

BELLINGHAM. Be still, sister. Have you no sense of propriety?

HIBBINS. I love a good public scolding. *(To HESTER.)* Adulteress!

HESTER. Witch.

(BELLINGHAM, BRACKETT and HIBBINS are momentarily taken aback. DIMMESDALE is quite still.)

BELLINGHAM. Left to my own devices, Hester Prynne, I would lock you away from our citizenry for the rest of your days. Fortunately for you, our good Reverend Dimmesdale prevails upon me to exercise mercy.

HESTER. Is there a man among you who is sinless, Governor?

(MISTRESS HIBBINS laughs.)

BELLINGHAM. Your arrogance compounds your sin. You will be silent, Mistress Prynne! Silent!

HESTER. I have no wish other than to be silent, Governor. But I will not name the child's father.

(Thunder is heard in the distance. HESTER and PEARL begin to ascend the scaffold. DIMMESDALE steps forward and calls out to HESTER.)

DIMMESDALE. Hester!

(Thunder. It's much closer. HESTER turns towards DIMMESDALE. They regard each other calmly.)

PEARL. He calls out to her: Hester. Hester. My mother is mesmerized by no man, and yet, she is mesmerized by this man. I take immediately against him. Hester removes me from her breast and reveals our letter to the crowd. The hush is enormous.

(HESTER and PEARL resume their ascent to the scaffold. Lightning, as HESTER reaches the top of the scaffold and slowly removes her hands from her chest to reveal the scarlet letter to BELLINGHAM and DIMMESDALE.)

BELLINGHAM. What is she doing? What does that woman think she's *doing*.

DIMMESDALE. She is taking her place among us, Governor.

(Thunder. It's very near. ROGER CHILLINGWORTH appears beside BRACKETT, as if from nowhere. CHILLINGWORTH carries a small black bag. HIBBINS' attention is focused on CHILLINGWORTH.)

BELLINGHAM. She makes a nonsense of her penance.

DIMMESDALE. That letter is extraordinary.

CHILLINGWORTH. *(To BRACKETT.)* What a striking woman.

BRACKETT. A seamstress.

CHILLINGWORTH. What is her name?

HIBBINS. *(Calling out to CHILLINGWORTH.)* Adulteress!

CHILLINGWORTH. A woman as striking as she is worthy of adultery.

(More thunder, as if punctuation to CHILLINGWORTH'S comment.)

HIBBINS. *(Calling out to HESTER.)* Who's the father? We want the child's father. We want his blood.

BELLINGHAM. The citizenry demands your response, Mistress Prynne.

HESTER. Never.

(Thunder, lightning. It's terrifying.)

PEARL. The trees rock violently, Hester shivers and I am happy. Such a happy baby. The storm approaches.

DIMMESDALE. Hester. There is a way to spare yourself a lonely indignity. Is it not proper to share the burden of punishment?

HESTER. I prefer my own company.

BRACKETT. *(To CHILLINGWORTH.)* Why don't I know you?

CHILLINGWORTH. I've come from the woods. I'm a doctor.

BRACKETT. I don't know many doctors who come from the woods.

CHILLINGWORTH. Your minister is ill.

DIMMESDALE. Hester, will you not give us his name? A better fate awaits him should you name him.

HESTER. How?

DIMMESDALE. I... pardon?

HESTER. A better fate. How does it await him?

DIMMESDALE. Well, we presume. We trust... that it does.

HESTER. I don't.

(PEARL raises her hand and points to DIMMESDALE. DIMMESDALE falls to his knees. He places his hand over his heart. Thunder, lightning. It's a violent storm.)

CHILLINGWORTH. I told you. Your minister is ill. See how he falls.

BRACKETT. But you come from the woods. How did you know?

BELLINGHAM. Hester Prynne: Your indifference grieves our good minister.

HESTER. I am anything but indifferent.

DIMMESDALE. *(To BELLINGHAM.)* Leave her. It's no use. She won't speak.

PEARL. The minister speaks. I scream.

BELLINGHAM. *(To HESTER.)* Calm that child.

(HESTER remains still.)

HIBBINS. *(To CHILLINGWORTH.)* The infant speaks to us.

CHILLINGWORTH. Indeed.

HESTER. The child will not be calmed, Governor, as the storm will not be calmed.

BELLINGHAM. Hester Prynne: Sentence cannot be delayed. You--and you child who will not be calmed--will remain on the scaffold this day for a period of three hours. And you will be looked upon by every citizen of Boston and you will wear the letter of the adulteress upon your person for the rest of your days, Hester Prynne.

PEARL. And then it happens. A mighty storm descends, the crowd disperses in fear, and a chill seizes Hester as surely

as a noose might tighten about her neck.

(CHILLINGWORTH takes a step towards the scaffold. DIMMESDALE watches him.)

CHILLINGWORTH. Hester Prynne: Give us his name. The child's father. Tell us his name.

(A great crack of thunder as HESTER and CHILLINGWORTH regard each other.)

HESTER. I have said all that I mean to say, sir.

(CHILLINGWORTH moves towards HESTER.)

DIMMESDALE. I don't feel at all well.

BELLINGHAM. Heartbreak.

DIMMESDALE. Surely it's just a simple stomach upset. There's no need—

BELLINGHAM. Heartbreak and disappointment. A young member of your flock gone astray.

(More lightning, thunder. CHILLINGWORTH stands at the edge of the scaffold and holds out his hand as if to calm PEARL.)

PEARL. And I who will not be calmed am calmed by this humpbacked old man with a black bag. He's extraordinarily ugly. But I adore him.

CHILLINGWORTH. Will you not tell me his name, Hester Prynne?

(Lights down on all but CHILLINGWORTH and HESTER. A Silence. CHILLINGWORTH holds out his hand to HESTER and helps her down from the scaffold. He opens his bag and from it removes a small vial of liquid, which he sets down between himself and HESTER. He examines HESTER thoroughly: eyes, ears, mouth, throat, reflexes--the works. They speak throughout the examination.)

CHILLINGWORTH. The child is fine. No fever. A healthy set of lungs.

HESTER. Her name is Pearl.

CHILLINGWORTH. Of course, she may yet prove to be ill. Such bad weather lately. So cold.

HESTER. My daughter is called Pearl.

CHILLINGWORTH. And so unpredictable. The storm this afternoon, for instance. A freak cloudburst, one might say. Which began precisely at the moment you stepped upon the scaffold and ended precisely at the moment you stepped back inside this prison. The coincidence of weather is thrilling. Don't you think? *(A beat.)* The child is quiet now. She took to the draught.

HESTER. You're remarkably unattractive. *(A beat.)* And your hump. It's grown.

(HESTER reaches out to touch CHILLINGWORTH'S hump. He grabs her hand.)

CHILLINGWORTH. Do not touch me.

HESTER. I admire deformity.

(CHILLINGWORTH offers the vial of liquid to HESTER.)

CHILLINGWORTH. Cruelty becomes you.

HESTER. Will you poison me? You've already poisoned my child.

CHILLINGWORTH. If that's true, you stood by and watched it happen. *(Beat.)* You look old, Hester. Punished.

HESTER. Let me touch your hump.

CHILLINGWORTH. Take the draught.

HESTER. You make an odd doctor. And what do you call yourself now?

CHILLINGWORTH. Roger Chillingworth. Take the draught, Hester.

(HESTER does. She then reaches out to touch Chillingworth's hump. He again stops her. He traces the outline of the scarlet letter with one finger.)

CHILLINGWORTH. You're good with a needle.

HESTER. I took your medicine, Mister Chillingworth. Now leave me.

CHILLINGWORTH. Stunning work. And the child, she's a stunning piece of work as well.

HESTER. *(After a beat.)* I never loved you.

CHILLINGWORTH. My argument is not with you, Hester.

(CHILLINGWORTH places HESTER'S hand on his hump.)

HESTER. I don't remember you being so ugly.

CHILLINGWORTH. I was ugly when I married you.

HESTER. You sent no word. I waited two years. I could wait no longer.

CHILLINGWORTH. I was gaining knowledge. Touch me.

(CHILLINGWORTH moves HESTER'S hand along his back.)

CHILLINGWORTH. It was with reluctance I left the woods, Hester. But I do not question my hunches and I had this hunch about you. An urge to track you down again. Boston will know me as a physician, Hester. A healer. Do not lead people to believe otherwise.

HESTER. You had a kindness about you once. A gratefulness. When I brought you tea or woke you from a nightmare you looked at me with such decency.

(CHILLINGWORTH removes HESTER'S hand from his back.)

CHILLINGWORTH. The draught has not killed you. See?

HESTER. You won't be staying long in Boston. If you don't plan to claim me as your wife.

CHILLINGWORTH. The town needs a good doctor. I'll stay.

HESTER. You're not a doctor.

CHILLINGWORTH. I can isolate a sickness. Cure an ailment. Administer to grief. I've used these two years wisely, Hester. Have you?

HESTER. I have Pearl.

CHILLINGWORTH. And I will have my vengeance.

HESTER. You have it now.

CHILLINGWORTH. I believe the child's father was present today. In the marketplace. Somewhere in the crowd he was sweating under his collar. And what a crowd there was. You're famous, Hester. All of New England knows your name. And I, a humble doctor, among your admirers. I'll find him, Hester.

HESTER. You've found me. It's enough.

CHILLINGWORTH. I sent you here, it's true. I have myself to blame. But I did not abandon you.

HESTER. No. I abandoned you. Let me abandon you.

(Lights up on PEARL in the graveyard. She picks flowers off the graves.)

CHILLINGWORTH. I will stay in Boston, Hester. And so will you.

HESTER. I might not. I might go elsewhere.

CHILLINGWORTH. You flaunt your sin, Hester. And your punishment. Your vanity will not allow you to leave.

HESTER. We used to sleep together. I fed you when you were ill. I bathed you.

CHILLINGWORTH. I am not a child, Hester. I'm ugly. And my ugliness will find him out. And when I find him, I shall make his torment my life's work.

HESTER. Your life can't last much longer.

CHILLINGWORTH. No. But his can.

HESTER. If I close my eyes, I might convince myself you're handsome. You could be Pearl's father.

CHILLINGWORTH. I'm not very paternal, Hester. *(A beat.)* Take care. You will not reveal me to anyone. We will not meet again.

HESTER. I hate you. But I won't betray you.

CHILLINGWORTH. You've already betrayed me. Now keep me a secret.

HESTER. Sometimes I think I'll take Pearl far from here. I'll teach her to read and she'll grow to have many friends. I'll remarry into great wealth. My daughter's popularity will be legendary. *(Beat.)* It's a thought.

CHILLINGWORTH. Beyond here is the woods, Hester. A vast space full of nothing but a threat of the unseen.

HESTER. I said it was only a thought.

CHILLINGWORTH. I know you never loved me. *(Beat.)* I'm certain the child's father is a man of high standing, Hester. Your taste was always impeccable. *(Beat.)* Pearl. What a ridiculous name.

(CHILLINGWORTH exits. HESTER removes her bonnet and shakes loose her hair. She runs her fingers through her hair, as if to comb it out.)

PEARL. Time passes. As it will. We live in a cottage on the outskirts of town, Hester and me. We live in a cottage by the edge of the sea and mostly I speak to no one and no one speaks to me.

(MISTRESS HIBBINS enters the graveyard. She carries a small hand mirror behind her back. Lights fade from HESTER.)

HIBBINS. Oh my. Playing with the dead. What an inventive little girl.

PEARL. Go away.

HIBBINS. And so polite. Your mother's taught you well.

PEARL. You don't know Hester.

HIBBINS. But I do. She's my sister. I'm your aunt.

PEARL. Hester has no friends and I'm her only relative.

HIBBINS. A little girl as bright as you should know of metaphor. Let me tell you about metaphor, Pearl.

(HIBBINS holds out the mirror to PEARL. PEARL looks into the mirror.)

HIBBINS. Tell me, Pearl, what do you see?
PEARL. Dirt.
HIBBINS. And what else?
PEARL. Nothing. Dirt. I have dirt on my face.

(HIBBINS replaces the mirror behind her back.)

HIBBINS. What a vain little girl. You can't stop looking at your own reflection in the glass.
PEARL. They say you're a witch.
HIBBINS. Who says I'm a witch?
PEARL. Everybody.
HIBBINS. But you haven't any friends. Nobody talks to you.
PEARL. Hester doesn't have friends. I have friends, though. Many friends.
HIBBINS. Where are these friends?
PEARL. Here. And there.
HIBBINS. We can be friends. Good friends.
PEARL. You're too old to be my friend.
HIBBINS. I can take you with me to the woods.
PEARL. When?
HIBBINS. At night.
PEARL. And who will we meet?
HIBBINS. My friends. Your mother's friends. The man.
PEARL. Which man?
HIBBINS. The dark man. He owns the woods.
PEARL. Why didn't Hester tell me she had a sister?
HIBBINS. Why do you call your mother by her Christian name?
PEARL. I'm wild. Hester says so.

HIBBINS. Why does your mother wear the scarlet letter?

PEARL. Because it's red. And red is gorgeous.

HIBBINS. No. Guess again.

PEARL. Because it's wild. Like me.

HIBBINS. You are a smart girl. And who gave your mother her pretty letter?

PEARL. Nobody. It's just there.

HIBBINS. I'll tell you a secret. I have a letter, too. So do you. But you can't see them.

PEARL. You're lying. Hester's letter is special.

HIBBINS. It may be special, Pearl, but she got it from somebody. Who gave it to her?

PEARL. The wind. It came from the wind.

HIBBINS. It came from the dark man. And who is the dark man?

PEARL. He lives in the woods.

HIBBINS. That's right. And he's your father, Pearl.

PEARL. I have no father.

HIBBINS. Let me take you to him.

PEARL. When?

HIBBINS. At night.

PEARL. When.

HIBBINS. Soon.

PEARL. How soon?

HIBBINS. Soon enough. *(She holds up the mirror to her own face.)* Look Pearl: What do you see?

(PEARL looks into the mirror with HIBBINS.)

PEARL. I see me.

HIBBINS. And me. You see me. We are the same. We are

from the same place, Pearl. Let's be friends.

PEARL. What will you give me?

HIBBINS. Knowledge, Pearl. I will give you knowledge.

PEARL. Pick flowers with me.

HIBBINS. They're not your flowers.

PEARL. Everything's mine.

HIBBINS. How old are you, Pearl?

PEARL. Seven. I'm lucky. Pick flowers with me. I take them to Hester.

HIBBINS. They're flowers for the dead, Pearl. Not the living. Do you know the difference? Let me teach you the difference.

PEARL. You're dead. Witches are dead.

HIBBINS. If I pick flowers with you, you'll have to come to the woods with me.

PEARL. I like the woods.

HIBBINS. And you'll be my special friend.

PEARL. You laughed at me.

HIBBINS. When? When did I laugh at you?

PEARL. Then. When I stood with Hester. On the scaffold.

HIBBINS. You were an infant when you stood on the scaffold with your mother.

PEARL. I remember.

HIBBINS. I know.

(Lights up on DIMMESDALE and CHILLINGWORTH at the edge of the wood. CHILLINGWORTH appears to be older and more unattractive. DIMMESDALE walks with difficulty and uses a cane. CHILLINGWORTH supports him. They walk toward the graveyard.)

PEARL. Why do you carry a looking glass?

HIBBINS. So I never miss a trick. Why are you such an odd child?

PEARL. I'm not a child. I'm a treasure.

HIBBINS. So you are.

(HIBBINS picks a bit of weed from a grave and holds it out to PEARL.)

PEARL. What's that?

HIBBINS. A gift. From your father.

(PEARL reaches out cautiously for the weed.)

HIBBINS. Take it.

(PEARL suddenly grabs HIBBINS' hand and bites it.)

HIBBINS. *(Nonchalant, as she considers her wound.)* Do you always bite your friends?

PEARL. I'm odd. You said so. Do witches bleed?

(CHILLINGWORTH and DIMMESDALE approach the graveyard. CHILLINGWORTH carries his black bag.)

HIBBINS. Ask your mother. Ask the minister.

PEARL. *(To DIMMESDALE):* Do witches bleed?

(CHILLINGWORTH laughs. DIMMESDALE is silent.)

CHILLINGWORTH. Good day, Mistress Hibbins. I see

you are busy schooling our young.

HIBBINS. Mister Chillingworth. My favorite physician.

PEARL. Minister. Do witches bleed?

DIMMESDALE. *(He's tentative.)* You should hold your tongue, child. *(A beat.)* Impertinence is dangerous.

PEARL. Is it?

CHILLINGWORTH. Isn't this the Prynne girl?

HIBBINS. The same. A real beauty. Just like her father.

PEARL. I want to know. She said you'd know.

DIMMESDALE. I'm afraid Mistress Hibbins is having a joke at your expense. Shouldn't you be at home?

PEARL. Why? Why should I be at home?

DIMMESDALE. Your mother needs you. *(A beat.)* Surely.

PEARL. I'm playing.

DIMMESDALE. In a graveyard?

PEARL. You live above the graveyard, minister. Is there something wrong with it?

DIMMESDALE. No child. There's nothing wrong with the graveyard.

PEARL. Are you ill?

DIMMESDALE. I've been better.

PEARL. You're always ill. Why are you ill?

DIMMESDALE. Only God knows.

PEARL. I know why.

DIMMESDALE. I'm sure you don't.

PEARL. You're odd. You walk with a cane.

CHILLINGWORTH. Perceptive for her age.

HIBBINS. Like her father.

DIMMESDALE. Mistress Hibbins, that is quite enough. The child is fatherless.

PEARL. Jesus was fatherless.

DIMMESDALE. Who told you that?

PEARL. Hester told me that. You look unwell, minister. Are you unwell?

DIMMESDALE. It is none of your concern.

PEARL. I'm concerned about witches. You should tell me if they bleed.

DIMMESDALE. You need not fear witches, child.

PEARL. I'm not afraid. But you are.

CHILLINGWORTH. Such big thoughts for such a small girl. Go home now, child. You have not business here.

PEARL. *(To DIMMESDALE.)* Will you die soon?

(HESTER enters.)

HESTER. Pearl. Come here.

PEARL. Hester.

(PEARL goes to HESTER.)

HESTER. I turned around and you'd disappeared. Don't ever disappear on me.

PEARL. He scared me.

HESTER. Who scared you?

PEARL. The minister. I was playing and he scared me.

DIMMESDALE. Mistress Prynne, I assure you—

HIBBINS. Good day, Mistress Prynne. Will I see you tonight? Will you ride with me?

(A silence. HESTER takes PEARL'S hand and they exit.)

HIBBINS. Such rudeness. I only asked her a question.

CHILLINGWORTH. Indeed.

HIBBINS. And you, minister. Will you ride with us this evening?

DIMMESDALE. You're bleeding, Mistress Hibbins.

HIBBINS. *(She looks at her bleeding hand):* So it's true after all.

DIMMESDALE. You speak in riddles.

HIBBINS. Do I? *(She laughs.)* We'll meet again, minister.

(HIBBINS exits.)

CHILLINGWORTH. An altogether stimulating woman, don't you think?

DIMMESDALE. Perhaps from a... medical... standpoint.

CHILLINGWORTH. Not at all. She speaks her mind. An attractive quality.

DIMMESDALE. I've never given her a second thought.

CHILLINGWORTH. Why not?

DIMMESDALE. Why should I?

CHILLINGWORTH. Because you're a man.

DIMMESDALE. I'm a busy man.

CHILLINGWORTH. A young man. A potentially vital man.

DIMMESDALE. She's a widow.

CHILLINGWORTH. Precisely. Besides, she's our Governor's sister. A very respectable catch. And she's experienced.

DIMMESDALE. I'd like to rest now. If I may.

CHILLINGWORTH. Surely you've at least an interest in rehabilitating Mistress Hibbins.

DIMMESDALE. She has no desire to be rehabilitated.

CHILLINGWORTH. Clever woman. I am an old man, Arthur.

I've lost my vigor. But if I were still young I would take to Hibbins. I would—

DIMMESDALE. Will you come this Sunday morning to hear my sermon?

CHILLINGWORTH. Will you accompany me to the brothel this Sunday evening? *(A silence. CHILLINGWORTH laughs.)* Arthur. A sense of humor has always eluded you.

DIMMESDALE. I'm not joking.

CHILLINGWORTH. Neither am I.

DIMMESDALE. Seven years. And I'm still eager for you to take an interest in my work.

CHILLINGWORTH. Yes. Rather like a schoolboy.

DIMMESDALE. My schooling's long finished, Roger.

CHILLINGWORTH. We learn something new every day.

DIMMESDALE. What have you learned today?

CHILLINGWORTH. That Mistress Hibbins is remarkably buxom.

DIMMESDALE. I hadn't noticed.

CHILLINGWORTH. You should have. *(Beat.)* Cheer up, Arthur. I take an interest in your health. Why must I also take an interest in your preaching?

DIMMESDALE. Because it is my health.

CHILLINGWORTH. Is it? I've heard differently. I've heard that lately, your sermons are quite inspired. And your illness has become much worse.

DIMMESDALE. Don't believe everything you hear.

CHILLINGWORTH. But I do. People leave the church in tears, Arthur. They are... transported. And you, so ill. One would think you've a vested interest in remaining ill.

DIMMESDALE. I feel better now. Stronger.

CHILLINGWORTH. You're a mess, Arthur. You're shrivel-

ing up. You ought to rest.

DIMMESDALE. There is no place to rest here.

CHILLINGWORTH. What better place to rest, Arthur, than in a graveyard? Sit.

(DIMMESDALE sits in the dirt.)

DIMMESDALE. Why do your medicines have no effect on me?

CHILLINGWORTH. Perhaps they do have an effect. *(Beat.)* It's quite a sight. A minister sitting in the dirt of a graveyard.

DIMMESDALE. It's hallowed ground.

CHILLINGWORTH. How do you know?

DIMMESDALE. It's... of course it's hallowed.

CHILLINGWORTH. But how do you know that?

DIMMESDALE. I just do.

CHILLINGWORTH. You question very little, Arthur.

DIMMESDALE. That's the nature of faith.

CHILLINGWORTH. But it's not the nature of living.

DIMMESDALE. The nature of life is inexplicable.

CHILLINGWORTH. Science explains life. And the nature of science is inquisitive.

DIMMESDALE. Curiosity killed the cat, Roger.

CHILLINGWORTH. How do you know?

DIMMESDALE. I... what a preposterous question. It simply... did.

CHILLINGWORTH. Have you ever actually seen curiosity kill a cat?

DIMMESDALE. No, I... it's... difficult to... for goodness sake. It's metaphorical. Very well. If you insist, your logic defeats me.

CHILLINGWORTH. Metaphor is intangible, Arthur. Logic is not. Logic leads to truth. And what is truth?

DIMMESDALE. Do not confuse me. I'm weak. Tired.

CHILLINGWORTH. But you told me you're feeling better. Stronger. The truth is, you're sitting in a pile of dirt.

DIMMESDALE. *(After a considered beat):* I admire you so much, Roger.

CHILLINGWORTH. Mistress Hibbins is quite voluptuous.

DIMMESDALE. She may have murdered her husband.

CHILLINGWORTH. Voluptuous women often do.

DIMMESDALE. Do they?

CHILLINGWORTH. The demands they make. Brutal.

DIMMESDALE. I'm exhausted, Roger.

CHILLINGWORTH. You appeal to me out here, in the open air. Sit awhile. Talk.

DIMMESDALE. I'm not a handsome man.

CHILLINGWORTH. I had a voluptuous wife, once. A buxom wife.

DIMMESDALE. I lack a certain... rugged... quality that appeals to women.

CHILLINGWORTH. She possessed a most delightful wit. She was inquisitive. Passionate.

DIMMESDALE. There is a... femininity about me... that appeals sometimes to children.

CHILLINGWORTH. And so young. She was a child herself when she married me. I took from her eagerly. Selfishly. She gave to me... well, who can say what the source of her generosity was.

DIMMESDALE. But I don't care much for children. They sweat. They're untidy.

CHILLINGWORTH. Perhaps it was her Mediterranean nature—

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