

**APPENDIX**

Eny Kusumawati

1213093128

## The Synopsis of

### "The Scarlet Letter" by Nathaniel Hawthorne

The prison-door is the setting of the scene in the seventeenth-century Boston, where a throng of drably dressed Puritans stand before the weather beaten wooden prison. There lies an unsightly plot of weeds, and beside it grows a wild rose-bush.

The crowd are waiting to witness the public punishment of Hester Prynne and her sin. Hester emerges from the prison, wearing an elaborately embroidered scarlet letter A (standing for "adultery") on her breast, and carrying a three-month old infant in her arms. Standing alone on that scaffold, Hester sees on the outskirts of the crowd a small, rather deformed man in the company of an Indian. Hester, sent ahead from Europe by her husband who was to follow her, has been in Boston for two years without any word from that learned gentleman. Because of the circumstances, she is not being executed for her sin of adultery with the unidentified father of the baby she holds, but will be forced to stand on the scaffold for three hours, and to wear the symbolic letter A for the rest of her

life. The stranger among the crowd is her husband, who remarks that the partner of her iniquity should stand on the scaffold by her side. But the stranger vows that he will be known.

Reverend Mr. John Wilson, Boston's oldest and most famous minister, Governor Bellingham and several other dignitaries sit observing her punishment. Hester's pastor, the young Reverend Mr. Arthur Dimmesdale is to plead with Hester that she reveal her partner in crime. Hester steadfastly refuses to name the father of her child.

Back in the prison cell, Hester is in an alarming state of nervous frenzy, and her child is writhing in convulsions of pain. The jailer brings to the cell a "physician", announced as Roger Chillingworth who is her husband. The two sit and talk intimately and sympathetically, each of them accepting a measure of blame for the situation which has developed. He, the injured husband, seeks no revenge against Hester. But he is determined to discover the man who has violated his marriage. Although he bears no letter of infamy wrought into his garment, as Hester does, but Chillingworth will read it on his heart.

Chillingworth then makes a reasonable request - that, if Hester is going to conceal the identity of her lover, she also keeps her husband's identity a secret. Hester takes an oath to keep his secret, though she expresses

fear that it may prove the ruin of her soul. To this he ominously replies not her soul, but her lover's.

Hester's term of imprisonment is ended. She is free and chooses to move into a small thatched cottage on the outskirts of Boston. She supports herself and her child through her skill as a seamstress. She is a complete social outcast, the target of vicious abuse by the "respectable" women and the thoughtless children of the community. All their abuse she takes patiently.

Hester's daughter, whom she has named "Pearl" as "being of great price," grows during her first three years of life into a physically beautiful, vigorous, and graceful little girl. The mother and daughter are almost constant companions, excluded from the circle of "respectable" society. Her only companion in play is her imagination; never creates friends, but always enemies - Puritans whom she pretends to destroy.

Hester has heard that certain influential citizens, feeling that it would be better for both the mother and the child, plan to take Pearl away from her. Alarmed, she sets out with Pearl for Governor Bellingham's mansion, to deliver some gloves he has ordered and, more important, to plead for the right to keep her daughter.

The group of men approaching include Governor Bellingham, the Reverend John Wilson, the Reverend Arthur

Dimmesdale, and Roger Chillingworth, who since the story's opening has been living in Boston as Dimmesdale's friend and physician, challenges Hester's fitness to raise the child in a Christian way to test Pearl's knowledge of the catechism. Pearl deliberately pretends ignorance; so they are ready to take Pearl out of Hester's hands immediately. Hester protests, she appeals to Dimmesdale to speak up for her. Hester should be allowed to keep Pearl, and Chillingworth raises the question, to analyze that child's nature, and from its make and mould, to give a shrewd guess at the father.

Chillingworth has been well received by the townspeople, not only because they can well use his services as a physician, but also because of his special interest in their ailing clergyman, Arthur Dimmesdale. In the intimacy of their companionship, gradually some of the townspeople, without any real evidence except the growing appearance of evil in his face, develop suspicions of Chillingworth. Rumors about his past and suggestions that he practices "the black art".

Chilingworth has become fiercely obsessed by his search into Dimmesdale's heart; the question of why a man should be willing to carry secret sins to his grave rather than confessing them during his lifetime. Because of the "constitution of their nature" or because if they are

revealed to the world as sinful they can no longer do God's work on earth. Chillingworth argues whether a false show can be better - can be more for God's glory, or man's welfare - than God's own truth. He is sure that such men deceive themselves.

Just then Hester and Pearl are seen through the open window, as Dimmesdale and Chillingworth discuss her abnormal nature, Pearl hears their voices. Looking up at the window, she calls to her mother to come away, or that old Black Man will catch her. He has got hold of the minister already. Dimmesdale finally says that his is a sickness of the soul, and, passionately crying that he will not reveal his secret to "an earthly physician", such as Chillingworth. He commits himself to the one Physician of the soul, and rejects that Chillingworth meddles in this matter. One noon, not long afterward, Chillingworth finds Dimmesdale asleep in a chair. Pulling aside the minister's vestment, he stares at Dimmesdale's chest. What he sees there causes him to turn away with a wild look of wonder, joy, and horror.

Now in full possession of Dimmesdale's secret, Chillingworth begins his unrelenting torture of the minister, subtly tormenting him by comments designed to trigger his fear and agony. Ironically, as the minister's suffering becomes more painful and his body weaker, his popularity

among the congregation grows stronger. They adore him as a "miracle of holiness." Such mistaken adoration further tortures Dimmesdale, and brings him often to the point of public confession. In capable of the one ache necessary to his salvation, Dimmesdale substitutes self-punishment, by often beating himself with a bloody scourge (while laughing bitterly), and by keeping frequent all-night vigils during which his mind is plagued by frightening visions. On one such night, seeking peace, Dimmesdale dresses carefully in his clerical vestments and walks from the house. Dimmesdale walks to the weather stained scaffold on which seven years before Hester had stood, he is overcome by a self-aborrence which leads him to shriek aloud. Dimmesdale denies having heard of it.

Hester is shocked at the change she has seen in Dimmesdale. While his intellect remains strong, his nerve and moral force seem to have been completely destroyed. But the seven years since Pearl's birth have brought changes to Hester also, and have won her much respect among those townspeople who once condemned her. Hester has changed in her person, as well as in her position. In her recent awareness of Dimmesdale's misery, however, she has found a new object for her emotional energies. She sees that he is on the verge of lunacy, and she feels that her promise to keep Chillingworth's secret is largely respon-

sible. She determines to talk with her former husband at the first opportunity.

As she talks with Chillingworth, Hester is shocked at the change which has occurred in him over the past seven years. His fierce, dark face and the occasional red glare in his eyes testify to the evil purpose which has been dominating his life. He has been transformed into a devil. She tells him how she regrets having promised to keep his identity secret, thus enabling him to get his clutches on Dimmesdale. Hester suggests that Dimmesdale would have been better off dead. Chillingworth admits, with a kind of fierce pride, to his inhuman torture of the minister. Chillingworth a mortal man, with once human heart, has become a fiend for his especial torment. Hester cries that she is as guilty as Dimmesdale. She pleads for mercy, asking to be freed from her promise concerning the physician's identity. Chillingworth says that it has all been a dark necessity. Hester is not really sinful, nor is he fiend-like. It is fate which has created the tragic situation. And as for telling Dimmesdale his secret, Chillingworth says that Hester may do as she wishes. Hester admits whether it be sin or not she hates the man. She feels that in marrying her he committed a worse sin than any she has committed against him.

Hester, anxious to tell Dimmesdale the true identity

of Chillingworth, meets Dimmesdale through the woods. Dimmesdale, looking haggard and feeble, and, with the aid of a staff, moving listlessly as though he has no purpose or desire to live. He holds his hand over his heart.

Finally Dimmesdale asks Hester, whether she has peace, to which she answers nothing but despair. He explains the misery of his ironic position, a minister idolized by his flock but carrying a dark sin concealed in his heart. When Hester gently suggests that his deep repentance and his good works have atoned for his sin, he rejects her comfort, adding that Hester is happy, that she wears the scarlet letter openly upon her bosom, his burns in secret. She reveals that Dimmesdale has long had such an enemy, and dwelles with him, under the same roof. She begs for Dimmesdale's forgiveness as she tells him that Chillingworth was her husband. Dimmesdale declares that Chillingworth's sin is greater than either Hester's or his own, what they did had a consecration of its own.

He appeals to Hester to think for him and be his strength. She urges him to leave Boston and start a new life elsewhere, to do anything than to lie down and die. She promises him that he would not go alone.

For Hester, a woman of independent mind and strong passions, who has never been a Puritan and who for seven years has not even been a member of society, the decision

to leave Boston is not a difficult one. But for Dimmesdale, a minister whose entire life (except for his one sinful act of uncontrolled passion) has been governed by the Puritan code, it is a different matter. Hester, also feeling exhilarated by her decision, removes and throws away her scarlet letter, which lands on the near bank of the brook.

In the excitement of their new relationship, Hester remembers that Dimmesdale hardly knows their daughter. Hearing her mother's call, she leaves her play and comes slowly toward the two adults. As Hester's requests turn to commands, Pearl, still pointing toward her mother's bosom, bursts into a passionate, shrieking fit of rage. Hester retrieves the letter, pins it on her bosom, and tucks her hair under her cap. Pearl resists, asking, if Dimmesdale will them, go back hand in hand, the three together, into the town. Her mother answers that he won't now, but that in the future they will live together and love each other. Hester and Dimmesdale make final plans for their escape from Boston.

Dimmesdale, is reviewing their plans to escape to Europe, Hester is secretly to book passage for two adults and a child, on a Bristol-bound cruiser due to leave Boston four days later, the day after Dimmesdale is scheduled to preach the important Election Sermon. Excited

by his decision, the minister hurries along the forest path, showing none of his recent feebleness. As he comes into town everything especially his own church, appears somehow changed and unfamiliar. The change, is shown by his behavior toward the people he meets. Dimmesdale declines the medicine and, suspecting that the physician may know of his interview with Hester.

On the Election Day, one of the most important Puritan holidays, Hester and Pearl start for the crowded market place. Chillingworth arrives, accompanied by the picturesque commander of the Bristol ship. He explains that Chillingworth, describing himself as a friend of both Hester and the gentleman she spoke of, has booked passage with them.

Before Hester can recover from the shock of the ship captain's disclosure, the Election Day procession begins. Hester's spirits sink as Pearl relays the captain's words. She is depressed both by the news and by the growing circle of people - Indians, sailors, and townspeople - who surround her, staring rudely and inquisitively at this woman with her scarlet mark of shame.

At the end of Dimmesdale's sermon, it is the most brilliant and triumphant moment in Dimmesdale's life. The feelings of the crowd are expressed in a spontaneous shout of tribute. they comment that never, on New England soil,

has stood the man so honored by his mortal brethren, as the preacher. But the shout dies to a murmur as the people see Dimmesdale tottering feebly and nervously along in the procession, his face a deathly hue.

As Dimmesdale turns to the scaffold and calls Hester and Pearl to his side, Chillingworth appears and attempts to stop him. Dimmesdale, however, scorns Chillingworth and cries to Hester to help him to the scaffold. He tears the ministerial band from his breast and for a moment stands flushed with triumph before the horrified crowd. Then he sinks down upon the scaffold.

As Hester lifts his head and cradles it against her bosom, Chillingworth kneels and in a tone of defeat keeps repeating "Thou hast escaped me!" Dimmesdale asks God's forgiveness for Chillingworth's sin. He then turns to Pearl and, smiling sweetly, asks for a kiss. Pearl kisses his lips, then weeps. Dimmesdale, obviously dying, tells Hester farewell. His dying words are "Praised be his name! His will be done! Farewell!"