

*The*  
*Scarlet*  
*Letter*  
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 TIMELESS CLASSICS

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## On the Platform

It was the summer of 1642. An angry crowd gathered. They stood in front of a prison in Boston.

The people were Puritans. They followed a strict religious code. The men had beards. They wore dark clothes. The women wore white caps. They were waiting to see the prisoner. Her name was Hester Prynne.

“Reverend Dimmesdale is very

upset,” one woman said. “A scandal has come to his church.”

“The judges have been too kind,” said another woman. “We wouldn’t have been so easy on her. They should’ve branded her with a hot iron. She can cover up the letter. No one will know.”

“Marks and brands aren’t enough. She’s brought us shame. This woman should die!” another woman said. Her voice was angry.

“Have mercy! Your words are harsh,” said a man. “The prison door is opening. Here she comes now.”

A court official led the woman out



of prison. Hester Prynne walked out proudly. She smiled. She carried a young baby in her arms. She wore a letter A on her gown. It was made of fine red cloth. And decorated with gold thread. Hester had made it herself.

The people thought Hester would look sad. Instead, she looked like a free

spirit. All eyes looked at the scarlet letter. It made her different.

“The hussy!” said a woman. “How dare she decorate it!”

“We should strip her gown from her,” cried another woman.

“Make way,” the court official cried. “Let us pass. Everyone will get a good look at Mistress Prynne’s mark of sin. Come along, Mistress Prynne. Show your scarlet letter to the people.”

The walk seemed to take a long time. People shouted mean words. Every step was hard. Yet Hester looked calm.

A platform had been set up in the marketplace. It was next to Boston's oldest church. Hester climbed the steps. She stood there. Everyone stared. At first she felt like crying. She wanted to throw herself off. But then the crowd seemed to disappear. She saw people and places she had known in the past.

She saw her childhood home in Old England. She saw her father's face. She saw her mother. She saw her own face as a young girl.

There was another familiar face. It was the face of an older man. One of his shoulders was higher than the other. His eyes were dim from reading. A new life with him seemed to be waiting for her.

Then these scenes faded. Hester stood again in the marketplace. She wondered if this was really happening to her. She held her child tightly. The baby began to cry. She touched the scarlet letter. Yes! The baby was real. The shame was real. All else had disappeared.

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### A Familiar Face

Hester wished she could be somewhere else. She looked at the crowd. Two men caught her eye. One was an Indian. A white man stood beside him.

Hester stared at the white man's face. He looked very smart. One shoulder was higher than the other. She knew this man. Her eyes met his. He saw that Hester knew him. He put his finger to his lips.



The man asked, “Who is that woman? Why is she being shamed?”

Another man answered, “You must be a stranger. Hester Prynne raised a scandal in the church. She’s evil.”

“I’m a stranger here. I’ve been held captive by Indians. What were this woman’s crimes?”

“We punish sin here in Boston. This woman was the wife of a gentleman. He wanted to come here from England. He sent her here ahead of him. That was two years ago. There has been no word from him. A young wife, being left all alone ...”

“I see,” said the stranger. “So who’s the baby’s father?”

“It’s a mystery. Mistress Prynne refuses to tell.”

“The husband should come. He should look into it,” said the stranger.

“He’s likely dead. That’s why Mistress Prynne was not sentenced to death. Instead, she must stand on the platform. She must wear the scarlet letter all her life.”

“A wise sentence. But her partner should be punished too,” said the stranger. “Surely he will be known!”