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I Hear America Singing by Walt Whitman.

The poem consists of one stanza, which is made up of eleven lines. Whitman writes in his characteristic free verse. The structure is simple - it follows the simple list format that Whitman commonly employs in his poetry. One by one, he lists the different members of the American working class and describes the way they sing as they perform their respective tasks. He formats each line and sentence similarly, as many begin with the word "the," and contain phrases that are variations on "as he ___" or "on his way to ___." This structural choice gives the lines a quick pace and an a rhythmic whimsicality. Because of this, the poem gives the reader the sensation of hearing these carols in rapid succession.

This poem exemplifies the theme of musicality in Whitman's poetry. Whitman uses music to emphasize the interconnectedness of the human experience. Even though each worker sings his or her individual song, the act of singing is universal, and by extension, all of the workers unite under one common American identity.

Although Whitman is describing actual songs in this poem, there are instances earlier in the collection where he uses the word "sing" to stand in for "write" when referring to his poetry. This is because of Whitman's belief that poetry was strongest as an oral medium. Whitman wanted his poems to be spoken aloud because the words became more powerful when they can transcend the page. Because of this strong connection between music and poetry, Whitman often wrote his poems in a way that mimicked the natural rhythms of recitation and music.

The tone of the poem is joyful, whimsical, and hopeful. Whitman celebrates in the common American worker, magnifying his characters with descriptors such as "robust," "friendly," "blithe," and "strong." He highlights individuals that often go unnoticed in classic poems; these older verses focus on tales of brave soldiers and heroes. Ultimately, “I Hear America Singing” is a love poem to the nation. Whitman uses the small variations in individual experiences to crafts a wholesome, honest, and hardworking American identity.

In “I Hear America Singing,” the speaker describes various "carols" that arise from different figures in the American working class as people go about their work. He hears the mechanics, the carpenter, the mason, and the boatman singing. The deckhand, shoemaker, hatter, wood-cutter, and ploughboy sing their own songs, as well. The speaker celebrates each

individual song, which provides the connection between the worker and his/her task: for example, "the deckhand [sings] on the steamboat deck" and "the shoemaker [sings] as he sits on his bench." The speaker mentions the working women, as well. The mother and the young wife sing, as does the girl doing her sewing and washing. Each person in the poem has an individual carol, and together, they create the sound of "America Singing."

Lines 1-2

I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear,
Those of mechanics, each one singing his as it should be blithe and strong,

Our speaker doesn't waste any time. He (and we can only assume it's a he at this point) jumps right into the poem with a bold declaration: "I hear America Singing."

- Let's just take a moment to acknowledge that the speaker's use of "America" here is **figurative**. It's not like New York is singing alto while Montana jumps in in a soprano voice. Nope, the word "America" is a **symbol** for American *people* more generally.
- But the "singing" is not figurative. This poem is literally about Americans singing songs. Or, in the speaker's words, "varied carols." The speaker acknowledges that Americans sing all different kinds of songs in all different kinds of voices.
- First up: the mechanics. Their voices are "blithe" (which means joyous) and strong. And the mechanics voices are as they "should be." The mechanics meet the speaker's expectations.
- Before we move on, let's be sure to take note of these very long lines. Whitman wrote in **free verse**, which means that his poems do not have regular **rhymes** or **meter**, or even regular line-lengths.
- In fact, these long, free verse lines are perhaps what ol' W.W. is best known for. As we will see as the poem continues, you can cram a whole lot of info into a Whitmanesque long line. (Check out "**Form and Meter**" for more on that style.)

Lines 3-5

- *The carpenter singing his as he measures his plank or beam,*
  The mason singing his as he makes ready for work, or leaves off work,
  The boatman singing what belongs to him in his boat, the deck-hand singing on the steamboat deck,

- In the second line of a poem, we learned about a mechanic singing. Here, we're introduced to four more singing Americans: a carpenter, a mason, a boatman, and a deck-hand.
- Starting to notice any similarities? These guys are all laborers. They're all at work. Even more specifically, they are manual laborers, who work with their hands.
- Not everyone can sing at work after all. If you are a lawyer making your case in court, you can't exactly burst out into a rousing chorus of "America the Beautiful," can you? We think not.
- The singing workers are all dudes who do tough manual labor—the carpenter making his measurements, the deck-hand ready to work on the steamboat deck. This is unglamorous work for sure, but through their singing, these laborers take joy in what they do. Note the sense of ownership in the poem; the mason is "singing his" song, while the boatman is "singing what belongs to him in his boat."
- These guys are proud of what they do. And the speaker is proud to acknowledge their work (and their awesome singing voices) in this poem. He's shedding some light on people who don't often make appearances in poetry (especially in nineteenth-century America).

Lines 6-8

The shoemaker singing as he sits on his bench, the hatter singing as he stands,
The woodcutter's song, the ploughboy's on his way in the morning, or at noon intermission or at sundown,
The delicious singing of the mother, or of the young wife at work, or of the girl sewing or washing,

- Are you ready for more workers? We're ready for more workers.
- The next few lines of the poem cram in even more working dudes (and introduce some working ladies, too). Now we're got a shoemaker, a hatter, a woodcutter, a ploughboy, a mother, a young wife at work, a seamstress and washerwomen (whew).
- What do these peeps all have in common? **They work hard for their money**. And they all sing.

- By drawing together such different people doing different things, Whitman universalizes the issue of work. Whether you're old or young, black or white, woman or man, you need money to live. And how do you get money? By working. And how do you keep your spirits up by working? Singing, of course.
- And let's not forget that it may be necessary to keep those spirits up. The speaker acknowledges that the ploughboy works from "morning" to "sundown." This is a long day of hard labor, even if that ploughboy is singing his songs to pass the time.
- One particularly cool thing that Whitman does in this poem is that he acknowledges the work of women along with the manual labor of men doing "manly" jobs like woodcutting and plowing. The mother works, the young wife goes to work, the girls washes and sews.
- The world of labor is not just a man's world; Whitman celebrates the work of women—even the work of what we might now call the stay-at-home mom—

Lines 9-11

Each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else,
The day what belongs to the day—at night the party of young fellows, robust, friendly,
Singing with open mouths their strong melodious songs.

- The poem ends by bringing all of these singing laborers together. They are "each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else." The speaker acknowledges that each of their laboring is unique, that their work belongs to themselves.
- And he even acknowledges that this is true of women too; note that "him or her." Sure, this may not be a big deal now, but let's remember that Whitman wrote this poem decades before women could even vote in the US. Small moments like these are progressive, and we like 'em.
- But as much as the speaker of the poem celebrates work, he acknowledges that there's a time for work and a time for play. The singing of the day is different than the singing of the night; the daytime singing is "what belongs to the day." At night, it's party time.
- And what happens at party time? Well, "the young fellows, robust, friendly," keep singing; they sing "with open mouths their strong melodious songs."
- Singing: it's a daytime *and* a nighttime activity in Whitman's America. It's one big, star-spangled sing-a-long—good times.

- But before we end our analysis, let's just think for a moment about what singing means in the poems. Sure, singing here is **literal**.
- These dudes and dudettes are literally singing as they chop wood and as they make hats and as they take care of the laundry. We know that this singing is for real. The speaker tells us about their "strong," "melodious," even their "delicious" voices.
- But singing also has a **metaphorical** aspect. Sure these laborers are singing songs to keep themselves occupied while doing physical work, but Whitman interprets this singing as a celebratory sign that these laborers love their jobs, love their grueling labor. And these workers love America too.
- But is this rosy view of labor Whitman's alone? Is he perhaps a little *too* enthusiastic about what it means to spend all day sewing or cutting wood? (We'd take poetry writing over masonry work any day of the week.)
- Whitman loved to think about those working guys and gals singing as they worked. He acknowledged the hard manual labor done by people who didn't often get recognized in poetry back in good ol' nineteenth-century America (or today, even). But was his perspective a little skewed? Do you think "I Hear America Singing" leaves a lot out of the story of the working American man and woman?

A Bird Came Down The Walk - Emily Dickinson

A Bird came down the Walk-
He did not know I saw-
He bit an Angleworm in halves
And are the fellow, raw,

And then he drank a Dew,
From a convenient Grass-
And then he hopped sidewise to the Wall
To let a Beetle pass-

He glanced with rapid eyes
That hurried all around-
They looked like frightened Beads, I thought-
He stirred his Velvet Head

Like one in danger, Cautious,
I offered him a Crumb
And he unrolled his feathers
And rowed him softer home-

Then Oars divide the Ocean,
Too silver for a seam-
Or Butterflies, off Banks of Noon
Leap, plashes as they swim.

Summary:

Emily Dickinson, in full Emily Elizabeth Dickinson, (born December 10, 1830, Amherst, Massachusetts, U.S.—died May 15, 1886, Amherst), American lyric poet who lived in seclusion and commanded a singular brilliance of style and integrity of vision. With Walt Whitman, Dickinson is widely considered to be one of the two leading 19th-century American poets.

A Bird came down the Walk is a very popular poem by Emily Dickinson. It is focused on a small creature, a bird. She describes the bird as it comes in the garden but the choice of words makes the poem a memorable experience. The poem focuses on the separation between the worlds ot man and nature., and it also develops the theme of nature's indifference by including other questions of fear and struggle.

Stanza I shows the arrival of a bird on its routine walk on land. The bird was unaware of the presence of the speaker who was closely observing it. The bird cut the angleworm in halves and started eating it raw. It is totaly identified with nature and is extremely hostile to the worm which it eats.

Stanza II shows that the bird quenched its thirst by drinking the dew which was easily available on the blades of grass. The bird suddenly jumped aside to the wall to let the beetle

cross without offering any obstruction or resistance. It is politely indifferent to the beetle. This murderous act humanizes the little creature and places it in a diminutive animal world. The speaker is relishing her secret spying and this produces tragic tensions in this situation. His sudden courteous behaviour toward the beetle in stanza two hides the struggle among nature's creatures for survival that is witnessed in the stanza first.

Stanza III shows that the bird looked around very rapidly in panic. The birds eyes looked like 'frightened beads' rolling wildly in the grass. The poet observed it moving its velvet head which brought him closer to it. The natural habitat is being attacked, and the speaker praises the beauty of the bird under stress, a stress which is implied by the metaphors of its eyes like beads and its head like velvet. The birds sense of fear and danger is intensified with intervention of the speaker. Sensing fear, the bird finally flies away. The speaker's attempted reconciliation with nature fails in the end. Stanza IV shows that the speaker is inoved by the plight of the bird. He offers it crumbs to appease its fear of being cornered. Now the speaker finds himself in danger as the bird is about to flee.

Stanza V shows the wing motion of the bird which may be compared to that of oars rowing through the seamless ether, to take it home. The speaker's final bid to identify with the bird fails in the end. The bird departs into the ocean of air where all of, creation is seamless. The speaker estranges from others things. rowing on the ocean and seeing the butterflies as swimming. The closing lines show the butterflies jumping majestically of sun's hot sands into the liquid coolness of the sky. They portray a world of aesthetic perfection.

Mending Wall

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,
And spills the upper boulders in the sun;
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.
The work of hunters is another thing:
I have come after them and made repair
Where they have left not one stone on a stone,
But they would have the rabbit out of hiding,
To please the yelping dogs. The gaps I mean,

No one has seen them made or heard them made,
But at spring mending-time we find them there.
I let my neighbor know beyond the hill;
And on a day we meet to walk the line
And set the wall between us once again.
We keep the wall between us as we go.
To each the boulders that have fallen to each.
And some are loaves and some so nearly balls
We have to use a spell to make them balance:
'Stay where you are until our backs are turned!'
We wear our fingers rough with handling them.
Oh, just another kind of out-door game,
One on a side. It comes to little more:
There where it is we do not need the wall:
He is all pine and I am apple orchard.
My apple trees will never get across
And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.
He only says, 'Good fences make good neighbors.'
Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder
If I could put a notion in his head:
'Why do they make good neighbors? Isn't it
Where there are cows? But here there are no cows.
Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
What I was walling in or walling out,
And to whom I was like to give offense.
Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That wants it down.' I could say 'Elves' to him,
But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather
He said it for himself. I see him there
Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top

In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.
He moves in darkness as it seems to me,
Not of woods only and the shade of trees.
He will not go behind his father's saying,
And he likes having thought of it so well
He says again, ‘Good fences make good neighbors.’

Summary

Robert Frost is one of America’s most beloved poets, and "Mending Wall" is one of his most popular poems. Born in San Francisco, Frost moved to Massachusetts at age eleven following his father’s death. He attended both Dartmouth College and Harvard University, but never earned a college degree. He was, however, often invited to teach at Dartmouth and Harvard later on in his life. You know you’re good when you get to teach college students without having a diploma yourself. After spending some time in England, Frost befriended a lot of poetic giants, including William Butler Yeats and Ezra Pound. Frost won four Pulitzer Prizes in his lifetime, and he was asked to read a poem at President John F. Kennedy’s inauguration. If you are to randomly choose one of Frost’s poems and read it aloud on a busy street, we bet that a bunch of people will recognize the poem instantly as Frost’s – his sound and style is so unique. This poem tells the tale of a rock wall which sits between two properties in the countryside. Something continually destroys this rock wall. A compelling aspect of "Mending Wall" is the Frostian sense of mystery and loneliness. What begins as a quest to discover the identity of the wall-destroyer, ends in a meditation on the value of tradition and boundaries.

"Mending Wall" is the first poem in North of Boston, Frost’s second book of poetry. This book was published when Frost was in England, rubbing elbows with the likes of W.B. Yeats, T.S. Eliot, and Ezra Pound. Frost was a contemporary of many modernist poetic movements, but he isn’t associated with any particular group of poets. He marched to his own drummer, and as a result, he garnered a good deal of criticism from the literary world. But, it is precisely because he was such an individual and his voice so original that Frost became so beloved.

The speaker immediately tells us that something is amiss in the countryside. Something in the wide blue yonder does not like walls. He and his neighbor must get together every spring to walk the whole length of the stone wall that separates their properties, and to fix places where

the wall has crumbled. Then, our speaker begins to question the need for walls. He grows apples and his neighbor grows pine trees. His neighbor says that "good fences make good neighbors." The speaker becomes a bit mischievous in the spring weather, and wonders if he can try to make his neighbor reconsider the wall. His neighbor looks like a menacing caveman as he puts a rock into the wall, and repeats, "Good fences makes good neighbors."

There is some force that doesn't like walls. It causes the frozen ground to swell underneath a wall, and the wall's upper stones then topple off in the warmth of the sun. This creates gaps in the wall so big that two people could walk through them side-by-side. And then there are the hunters who take apart the wall—that's something different. I often have to come and fix the spots where hunters haven't left a single stone in place, as they tried to flush out the rabbits that hide in the wall in order to make their barking dogs happy. No one has seen or heard these gaps in the wall being made. We just find them there in the spring, when it comes time to fix the wall. I reach out to my neighbor, who lives over a hill, and we find a day to get together and walk along the wall, fixing these gaps as we go. He walks on his side of the wall and I on mine, and we deal only with whatever rocks have fallen off the wall on our side of it. Some of them look like loaves of bread and some are round like balls, so we pray that they'll stay in place, balanced on top of the wall, saying: "Don't move until we're gone!" Our fingers get chafed from picking up the rocks. It's just another outside activity, each of us on our side of the wall, nothing more.

There's no need for a wall to be there. On my neighbor's side of the wall, there's nothing but pine trees; my side is an apple orchard. It's not like my apple trees are going to cross the wall and eat his pine cones, I say to him. But he just responds, "Good fences are necessary to have good neighbors." Since it's spring and I feel mischievous, I wonder if I could make my neighbor ask himself: "Why are they necessary? Isn't that only true if you're trying to keep your neighbor's cows out of your fields? There aren't any cows here. If I were to build a wall, I'd want to know what I was keeping in and what I was keeping out, and who was going to be offended by this. There is some force that doesn't love a wall, that wants to pull it down." I could propose that Elves are responsible for the gaps in the wall, but it's not exactly Elves, and, anyway, I want my neighbor to figure it out on his own. I see him, lifting up stones, grasping them firmly by the top, in each hand, like an ancient warrior. He moves in a deep darkness—not

just the darkness of the woods or the trees above. He does not want to think beyond his set idea about the world, and he likes having articulated this idea so clearly. So he says it again: “Good fences are necessary to have good neighbors.

Lady Lazarus – Sylvia Plath

Summary

"Lady Lazarus" is a poem commonly understood to be about suicide. It is narrated by a woman, and mostly addressed to an unspecified person. The narrator begins by saying she has "done it again." Every ten years, she manages to commit this unnamed act. She considers herself a walking miracle with bright skin, her right foot a "paperweight," and her face as fine and featureless as a "Jew linen". She addresses an unspecified enemy, asking him to peel the napkin from her face. She inquires whether he is terrified by the features he sees there. She assures him that her "sour breath" will vanish in a day. She is certain that her flesh will soon be restored to her face after having been sacrificed to the grave. She will then be a smiling thirty-year old woman. She will ultimately be able to die nine times, like a cat. Shehas just completed her third death. She will die once each decade. After each death, a "peanut-crunching crowd" shoves in to see her body unwrapped. She addresses the crowd directly, showing them she remains skin and bone, unchanged from who she was before.

The first death occurred when she was ten, accidentally. The second death was intentional. She did not mean to return from it. Instead, she was as "shut as a seashell" until she was called back by people who then picked the worms off her corpse. She does not specifically identify how either death occurred.

She believes that

"Dying / Is an art, like everything else,"

and that she does it very well. Each time,

"it feels real," and is easy for her.

What is difficult is the dramatic comeback, the return to the same place and body, occurring as it does in broad daylight before a crowd's cry of "A miracle!" She believes people should pay to view her scars, hear her heart, or receive a word, touch, blood, hair or clothes from her.

In the final stanzas, she addresses the listener as "Herr Dockter" and "Herr Enemy". She sneers that she is his crowning achievement, a "pure gold baby." She does not underestimate his concern, but is bothered by how he picks through her ashes. She insists there is nothing but soap, a wedding ring, and a gold filling. She warns "Herr God, Herr Lucifer" to be beware of her because she is going to rise out of the ash and "eat men like air."

"Lady Lazarus" is a complicated, dark, and brutal poem originally published in the collection Ariel. Plath composed the poem during her most productive and fecund creative period. It is considered one of Plath's best poems, and has been subject to a plethora of literary criticism since its publication. It is commonly interpreted as an expression of Plath's suicidal attempts and impulses. Its tone veers between menacing and scathing, and it has drawn attention for its use of Holocaust imagery, similar to "Daddy."

The title is an allusion to the Biblical character, Lazarus, whom Jesus raised from the dead. The standard interpretation of the poem suggests that it is about multiple suicide attempts. The details can certainly be understood in this framework. When the speaker says she "has done it again," she means she has attempted suicide for the third time, after one accidental attempt and one deliberate attempt in the past. Each attempt occurred in a different decade, and she is now 30 years old. Now that she has been pulled back to life from this most recent attempt, her

"sour breath / Will vanish in a day," and her flesh will return to her bones. However, this recovery is presented as a failure, whereas the suicide attempts are presented as accomplishments - "Dying is an art" that she performs "exceptionally well." She seems to believe she will reach a perfection through escaping her body. By describing dying as “an art”, she includes a spectator to both her deaths and resurrections. Because the death is a performance, it necessarily requires others. In a large part, she kills herself to punish them for driving her to it. The eager "peanut-crunching crowd" is invited but criticized for its voyeuristic impulse.

The crowd could certainly be understood to include the reader himself, since he reads the poem to explore her dark impulses. She assumes that her voyeurs are significantly invested - they would pay the "large charge" to see her scars and heart. However, she imbues this impulse with a harsh criticism by comparing the crowd to the complacent Germans who stood aside while the Jews were thrown into concentration camps. Further, the crowd ultimately proves less an encouragement than a burden when they also attend the resurrection. She despises this second

part of the process, and resents the presence of others at that time. Whether this creates a vicious circle is implied but not explicitly stated.

Critic Robert Bagg explores the speaker's contradictory feelings towards the crowd by writing that Plath "is not bound by any metaphysical belief in the self's limitations. Instead of resisting the self's antagonists, she derives a tremendous thrill from throwing her imagination into the act of selfobliteration." She can destroy her body, but her imaginative self remains a performer, always aware of the effect she has on others.

The poem can also be understood through a feminist lens, as a demonstration of the female artist's struggle for autonomy in a patriarchal society. Lynda K. Bundtzen writes that "the female creation of a male-artist god is asserting independent creative powers." From this perspective, "Lady Lazarus" is not merely a confessional poem detailing depressive feelings, but is also a statement on how the powerful male figure usurps Plath's creative powers but is defeated by her rebirth. Though Lady Lazarus knows that "Herr Doktor" will claim possession of her body and remains after forcing her suicide, she equally believes she will rise and "eat men like air.

" Her creative powers can be stifled momentarily, but will always return stronger

"**Lady Lazarus": Death, depression, pain, and power are the major themes of this poem.** The disheartened speaker talks about her failed suicide attempts and give reasons for her resentment. She also expresses her anger for those who saved her from dying. Despite every effort to die she still survived. She continuously states the idea that she is being used as an object of entertainment. She regrets that her actions are watched as an act of amusement, rather than empathy. Moreover, the people, with their fake sympathies, are contributing more in her pain, and they are not allowing her to be free.

DEATH OF A SALESMAN

-ARTHUR MILLER

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ARTHUR MILLER

Arthur Miller was born into a middle-class Jewish family in Manhattan. In the stock crash of 1929, his father's clothing business failed and the family moved to more affordable housing in Brooklyn. Miller was unintellectual as a boy, but decided to become a writer and attended the University of Michigan to study journalism. There, he received awards for his playwriting. After college, he worked for the government's Federal Theater Project, which was soon closed for fear of possible Communist infiltration. He married his college sweetheart, Mary Slattery, in 1940, with whom he had two children. His first play, *The Man Who Had All the Luck* opened in 1944, but Miller had his first real success with ***All My Sons*** (1947). He wrote *Death of a Salesman* in 1948, which won a Tony Award as well as the Pulitzer Prize, and made him a star. In 1952, Miller wrote ***The Crucible***, a play about the 1692 Salem witch trials that functioned as an allegory for the purges among entertainers and media figures by the House Un-American Activities Committee. Miller testified before this committee, but refused to implicate any of his friends as Communists, which resulted in his blacklisting. In 1956 he married the film actress Marilyn Monroe. They were divorced in 1961. His third wife was the photographer Inge Morath. Miller continued to write until his death in 2005.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF *DEATH OF A SALESMAN*

During the postwar boom of 1948, most Americans were optimistic about a renewed version of the American Dream: striking it rich in some commercial venture, then moving to a house with a yard in a peaceful suburban neighborhood where they could raise children and commute to work in their new automobile. The difference between this and the nineteenth-century version of the same dream, in which a family or a single adventurer went into America's wilderness frontier and tried to make their fortune from the land itself, reflected the country's economic shift from agriculture to urban industry, and then from manufacturing into service and sales. Charley sums up this process at the end of the play when he says about Willy Loman, "He don't put a bolt to a nut… he's a man way out there in the blue, riding on a smile and a shoeshine."

DEATH OF A SALESMAN: ACT 1

The curtain rises on **Willy Loman**'s house in Brooklyn. The house, with its small backyard, looks fragile next to the tall apartment buildings that surround it. A soft flute melody is playing in the background. It is a Monday evening.

Willy Loman returns home from a sales trip, carrying two suitcases of merchandise. He is exhausted, or as he puts it, "tired to the death." Linda Loman, who is in bed, comes out to see him. She wonders why he is home early.

Willy tries to avoid talking about the reason for his early return. When **Linda** presses him, he admits that he lost his concentration while driving and nearly drove off the road. He explains that he opened the windshield of his car to enjoy the scenery and warm air, and became too lost in his dreams to drive.

Linda brings up what is clearly an old argument between them: she wants him to work in New York, closer to home. But **Willy** responds that he is a vital salesman in the New England area. He points out that he opened up this market to his company, though he adds that now the founder of the company is dead and his son, **Howard Wagner**, does not appreciate Willy's history of service.

The conversation turns to Willy and Linda's grown sons, **Happy** and **Biff**, who are upstairs sleeping after a double date. Biff has been working as a farm laborer all over the West, and has returned home for a visit. **Willy** had fought with Biff a day earlier about the fact that Biff has been content with low-paying manual work for ten years. While criticizing Biff to **Linda**, he calls Biff a lazy bum and then contradicts himself, praising Biff as a hard worker.

Linda convinces Willy to go downstairs to the kitchen so that he won't wake the boys. **Happy** and **Biff**, who are already awake, wonder if Willy has had another car accident.

Recalling his argument with **Willy**, **Biff** says that he doesn't know what he is supposed to want. He has tried following his father's salesman path and briefly worked as a shipping clerk, but he felt too constrained. He tells **Happy** how inspiring and beautiful it is to see a new colt born on the farm where he works. Then he admits to Happy that he has come home because he feels he has been wasting his life and needs a new direction.

Happy, who works at a department store, declares that he is not content either. He claims to feel guilty about his unethical behavior: sleeping with the girlfriends of higher executives and then attending their weddings, and taking bribes from manufacturers to put their items on display.

Biff decides he will ask his old employer, **Bill Oliver**, for some money to start a ranch, though he worries that Oliver still blames him for some basketballs that went missing when Biff worked there. **Happy** is encouraging, and reminds Biff that he is well liked. The boys are embarrassed to hear **Willy** downstairs talking to himself, and try to go to sleep.

In the kitchen, **Willy** is lost in a memory, which is acted out onstage. He is remembering a time when **Biff** and **Happy**, as young boys, helped him wash the car. Happy tries to get Willy's attention, but Willy is focused on Biff, who is playing with a new football. When Willy asks where he got it, Biff says he stole it from the locker room. Willy laughs, saying that if anyone less popular than Biff took that ball, there would be an uproar. He then goes on to tell the boys how well liked he is when he goes on business trips: he has coffee with the Mayor of Providence, and the police protect his car on any street in New England. He says he will soon open a bigger, more successful business than that owned by their neighbor, **Charley**, because he is better liked than Charley.

Bernard, **Charley**'s son, enters. He wonders why **Biff** has not come over to study math with him. Biff is close to flunking the subject, and **Willy** orders Biff to study, but is quickly distracted and impressed by the University of Virginia logo Biff has printed on his sneakers. Willy reasons that with scholarships to three universities, Biff can't fail. When Bernard leaves, Willy asks if he is well liked. His sons respond that Bernard is "liked," but not "well liked." Willy tells his sons that no matter how well Bernard does in school, he doesn't have the charisma to make it in the business world, but that the Lomans do.

A younger version of **Linda** enters. She asks **Willy** how much he sold on his trip. At first, he claims he made $1,200. Linda calculates his commission and is excited at the high figure. Willy then backs off, amending the amount down to $200. The underwhelming commission from this is $70, which is almost entirely swallowed up by what the family owes on their appliances and the car.

Sobered by the tiny amount that he has earned, **Willy** now worries to **Linda** that people don't seem to like him, which is stopping him from getting ahead. He wonders whether he talks and jokes too much, and confides that once he hit a fellow salesman because he overheard the man making fun of his weight. Linda tells him with fervor that, to her, he is the handsomest man in the world. Willy replies that Linda is his best friend and that he misses her badly when he's on the road.

As **Willy** says these words to **Linda**, **The Woman**'s laughter is heard from the darkness of another part of the stage The scene shifts, and now Willy is flirting with The Woman, a secretary for a buyer at one of the stores in Willy's territory, in a hotel room. She tells him that she picked him out from all the salesmen. He is extremely flattered. She thanks him for the stockings he has given her as a gift, and promises that when he returns she will make sure he gets to see the buyers.

Willy returns to his conversation with **Linda**, who is mending her stockings. Willy becomes upset, and orders her to throw the old stockings out. He says that he refuses to let his wife wear an old pair of stockings.

Willy's memories build to a crescendo. **Bernard** runs through, begging **Biff** to study for the upcoming exam. Willy tells Bernard to just give Biff the answers. Bernard refuses, then advises Biff to return the football. **Linda** complains that she has heard that Biff is too rough with the girls from school, and that their mothers are afraid of him. Willy responds that he will whip Biff when he finds him, but then becomes angry and defends Biff as someone with spirit and personality. To himself, he wonders why Biff is stealing footballs.

Happy comes downstairs, distracting **Willy** from his memories. Happy tries to convince Willy to come upstairs and go to bed. Willy wonders aloud why he didn't go to Alaska with his brother **Ben**, who started with nothing and made it rich by discovering a diamond mine in Africa. **Charley**, who has heard the voices in Willy's house, comes over from next door to see if **Willy** is all right. The two men play cards. Charley suspects from Willy's early arrival home that work is not going well for him, and offers him a job. Willy refuses, taking this friendly offer as an insult to his abilities as a salesman.

Willy asks **Charley** what he thinks of the new ceiling Willy has put up. Charley shows interest, but Willy quickly turns on him, mocking Charley because he can't handle tools.

In a kind of daydream, Willy's rugged, dignified older brother **Ben** appears onstage. **Willy** tells **Charley** that Ben died only a few weeks ago, in Africa. In his grogginess, he talks to Charley and Ben at the same time. He becomes confused, and accuses Charley, who has just won a hand, of playing the game wrong. Charley leaves, angry at the insult from Willy and disturbed that Willy is talking to his dead brother as if he is in the room.

Now alone, Willy remembers a time when **Ben** visited the house. In the memory, the two of them discuss their family history with Linda. Ben left home when Willy was nearly four years old to look for their father, who had abandoned them and gone to Alaska. His sense of geography was so poor, however, that he ended up in Africa and made a fortune in the diamond mines. Willy and **Linda** are impressed.

Willy calls **Biff** and Happy into the room and asks **Ben** to tell them about their grandfather. Ben describes "a very great and a very wild-hearted man," who traveled through America in a wagon with his family, selling the flutes that he made. He says that their father made more money in a week than Willy will make in a lifetime.

Willy boasts that his sons are also rugged. To test his claim, **Ben** begins to mock-wrestle with **Biff**, and then trips the boy and threatens him by hovering the point of his umbrella over Biff's eye. He gives Biff this lesson: never fight fair with a stranger. Willy, still anxious to impress Ben even though by now **Linda** is afraid of Ben, tells him that the family hunts snakes and rabbits in Brooklyn.

A younger Charley enters and warns Willy not to let his sons steal any more from the construction site nearby. Willy, still trying to impress **Ben**, brags that his sons are fearless characters. Charley counters that the jails are full of fearless characters. Ben laughs at Charley, and says that so is the stock exchange. Before leaving to catch his train, Ben praises Willy on how manly his boys are. Willy, pleased, asks Ben what he should teach his boys about life. Ben repeats his own success story. Willy is left with the idea that to succeed is to walk into a jungle and come out rich.

Willy wanders out into the back yard, still talking to the ghosts from his past. He tries to look up into the sky, but can't see anything because of the big buildings crowding in from all sides. He says: "Gotta break your neck to see a star in this yard."

Linda, who has heard **Willy** talking to himself, comes to the door to the backyard and asks him to come to bed. He responds by asking what happened to the diamond watch fob Ben had given him. She reminds him that he pawned it thirteen years ago, for **Biff**'s radio correspondence course.

Willy leaves to go on a walk, though he is in his slippers. **Biff** and **Happy** join **Linda** downstairs and the three of them have a worried conversation about Willy's mental health. Linda asks Biff why he fights with his father all the time, and whether he has come home to stay. Biff avoids committing. Linda tells him that one day he will return home, having been away, and won't recognize her or Willy anymore. She demands that he respect Willy.

Biff angrily responds that **Willy** never respected her. Linda counters that Willy may not be a great man, but he is a human being, and deserves to have attention paid to him. He has lost his salary, she reveals, and is working only on commission. Nobody will buy from him anymore, and he borrows fifty dollars a week from **Charley** and claims it is his salary. She tells her sons that Willy has worked all his life only for their benefit.

Linda says that **Biff** and **Happy** have been ungrateful to their father. She says that Happy is a "philandering bum," and that Biff has been remiss as a son. Feeling guilty, Biff angrily offers to stay in his old room, in a city that he hates, to get a job and help her and Willy cover their expenses. Linda just asks him to stop fighting with Willy all the time, and reveals that Willy's car accidents weren't actually accidents: he has been trying to kill himself. She mentions a woman who witnessed the last accident. Biff mishears and thinks that she is talking about **The Woman**. Finally, **Linda** tells the boys that she found a rubber hose behind the fuse box in the basement, and a new nipple on the gas pipe of the water heater, which she thinks means that **Willy** had tried to asphyxiate himself. Biff decides that though he hates the business world, it will be best for his family if he stays home and tries to make another go of it.

When **Willy** enters, having overheard his family arguing about him, **Biff** tries to joke, saying that Willy might whistle in an elevator. Willy takes offense, thinking that Biff is somehow calling him crazy, and declares that he is still a big shot among salesmen.

To diffuse **Willy**'s anger, **Happy** announces that **Biff** is going to ask his old boss **Bill Oliver** to ask for stake money to start a business. Willy is intrigued. On the spot, Happy comes

up with the idea that he and Biff, both athletes, will start a sporting goods company and hold exhibition events in which the brothers will participate to promote it.

Excited by the sporting goods idea, which they call the "Florida idea," **Willy** gives advice to **Biff** regarding the interview. He tells Biff that he should walk into the office very seriously, then changes his mind and tells him he should walk in with a big laugh. He also tells Biff not to pick up anything that might fall off **Oliver's** desk, because that's a job for an office boy. But when **Linda** tries to offer advice, Willy keeps shushing her. Biff gets angry at his father, and the two of them once again start to argue, but they manage to reconcile slightly before Willy goes to sleep.

In bed that night, **Linda** asks **Willy** what Biff has against him, and reminds him to ask **Howard Wagner** for a sales position in New York. He tells her he is too tired to talk. **Biff**, meanwhile, searches in the basement and is horrified to find the rubber hose behind the heater. He takes it and goes upstairs to bed.

Death of a Salesman: Act 2

When **Willy** wakes the next morning, **Biff** and **Happy** have already gone, and **Linda** tells Willy that Biff is on his way to see **Bill Oliver**. Excited by the prospects of the "Florida idea," Willy tells Linda that he wants to buy some seeds and plant a garden in the back yard. Linda is overjoyed at Willy's high spirits, but laughingly reminds him that their yard doesn't get enough sun to support a garden. Willy jokes that they'll just have to get a country house.

Linda then reminds Willy to ask **Howard Wagner** for a salaried non-traveling position in New York. She also tells him to ask for an advance to cover their last payment on their twenty-five year home mortgage, as well as payments on their refrigerator and Willy's life insurance premium. He agrees.

Before **Willy** leaves, **Linda** tells him that the boys want to take him to a fancy dinner at Frank's Chop House, a steak restaurant in Manhattan. Willy is elated, but just then notices a stocking in Linda's hand. He tells her not to mend stockings, at least not while he's around.

Right after **Willy** leaves, **Linda** answers a phone call from **Biff**. She tells him what she thinks is good news: that the rubber hose Willy attached to the gas heater is gone, implying that he took it away himself. She is disappointed to hear that Biff was the one who removed it the night before.

Willy arrives at **Howard Wagner's** office, and timidly enters. Howard is playing with a wire recorder he bought for dictation, but has been using to record his own family. He makes Willy listen to his daughter whistling, his son reciting state capitals, and his shy wife refusing to talk. Willy tries to praise the device, but Howard shushes him. Howard then tells Willy he should get one of the recorders, as they only cost a hundred and fifty dollars. Willy promises to do just that.

When **Howard** gets around to asking why **Willy** isn't in Boston, Willy explains that he doesn't want to travel anymore. He asks Howard for a salaried job at the New York office for $65 a week. Howard says no position is available, and looks for his lighter. Willy finds the lighter and hands it to Howard, and, growing desperate, reminds Howard that he helped name him. Willy lowers his salary requirement to fifty dollars a week, but Howard reiterates that there's no position.

Willy tells a story of a salesman who inspired him, Dave Singleman. Dave sold until he was eighty-four, going into hotel rooms and contacting buyers by phone. He died "the death of a salesman," alone in a train compartment, but was mourned by hundreds of salesmen and buyers. As a young man, Willy had wanted to go to Alaska and try to strike it rich like his father and brother, but Dave's success and respected position convinced Willy that selling was honorable, full of potential, and "the greatest career a man could want." He complains to **Howard** that there is no friendship or respect in the business anymore.

Willy continues to mention **Howard**'s father and lowers his salary requirement, but Howard is uninterested. He leaves his office to speak with some other employees, telling Willy him to pull himself together in the meantime. Willy, alone, begins to speak to the late Frank Wagner, the former owner of the company and Howard's father, but accidentally turns on the tape recorder, filling the room with the voice of Howard's son. He anxiously shouts for Howard to come back and turn it off.

Howard comes back in and unplugs the tape recorder. He tells **Willy** that he is no longer welcome to represent the company in Boston. Referring to Willy, his elder, by the term "kid," Howard tells Willy to take a long rest and let his sons support him. Willy refuses out of pride, but as Howard continues to insist it eventually dawns on Willy that he is being fired.

Howard leaves, and Willy slips into a memory in which **Ben** is offering him an opportunity to come to Alaska to manage a tract of timberland. Before Willy can accept, **Linda** appears and tells Ben that Willy is on track to become a member of the firm, so he can't take the offered job. Ben asks Willy whether he can reach out and touch his success. Willy responds by pointing to his son, **Biff**, who plays football and is about to go to college. He tells Ben that what's important isn't what you do, but being liked by people, and that this quality is as tangible as timber.

Now in a new memory, **Bernard** enters as the Loman family is preparing to go to **Biff**'s football game. He asks to carry Biff's helmet, but Happy insists on carrying that. Biff allows Bernard to carry his shoulder pads. **Charley** enters and jokes with Willy about the game, trying to deflate Willy's excessive expectations about the game. Willy becomes angry and accuses Charley of thinking he's better than everyone else.

Bernard, now grown, is waiting in the reception room outside **Charley**'s office. Charley's secretary, **Jenny**, comes in to ask Bernard to deal with **Willy**, who has come to see Charley but is still lost in his memory, arguing with Charley about the football game. Bernard, a lawyer, speaks with Willy, and in the course of conversation mentions that he has a case in Washington, D.C. Willy replies that **Biff** is also working on a big deal. Willy suddenly becomes upset, and asks Bernard why Biff never accomplished anything after the big football game when he was 17.

The two of them agree that **Biff**'s life derailed after he failed math. Bernard recalls that Biff had been determined to go to summer school and make up the class. But then Biff took a trip to Boston to see **Willy**, and when he returned he didn't go to summer school, burned his University of Virginia sneakers, and fought with Bernard, ending their friendship. Bernard asks Willy what happened in Boston. Willy becomes defensive, claims that nothing happened, and says he isn't to blame for Biff's failure.

Just then, **Charley** comes out of his office and hands **Bernard** a goodbye gift, a bottle of bourbon. He tells Willy that Bernard is going to argue a case in front of the Supreme Court. Willy, impressed and jealous, can't believe that Bernard hadn't told him.

Bernard leaves, and Willy follows **Charley** into his office. Charley starts to count out the usual fifty dollars, but **Willy** sheepishly asks for a hundred and ten because of all his payments due.

Charley wonders why Willy won't just take his job offer, which would allow Willy to make fifty dollars a week. Willy is still too proud to take it, and says he already has a job. Then he breaks down and tells Charley that Howard has just fired him, and repeats his philosophy that to be successful, a man must be impressive and well-liked. Charley asks, rhetorically, if anyone would have liked J.P. Morgan if he wasn't rich.

Charley gives **Willy** the money to pay his life insurance premium. Willy muses that he has ended up worth more dead than alive, but Charley angrily refutes this. Willy tells Charley, "you're my only friend," and leaves Charley's office on the verge of tears.

At Frank's Chop House, **Happy** banters with **Stanley**, a waiter he knows. When Biff arrives, Happy is flirting with an attractive girl, **Miss Forsythe**. She claims to be a cover model, while Happy says that he is a champagne salesman. Happy introduces **Biff** as a quarterback for the New York Giants. He asks Miss Forsythe, who it seems likely is a call girl, if she can continue to chat, and possibly call a friend. She agrees and goes off to make a call.

Once she is gone, **Biff** tells **Happy** that he waited in **Bill Oliver**'s waiting room for six hours. When Oliver finally came out, he gave Biff one look and walked away. Apparently, Oliver didn't remember Biff at all. Biff wonders how he had ever come to think that he had been a salesman for Oliver. In fact, he had just been a shipping clerk, but somehow Willy's exaggerations had convinced him and everyone else in the family that he was actually a salesman. Humiliated after Oliver failed to recognize him, Biff snuck into Oliver's office, stole his fountain pen and fled the building.

Biff tells Happy that he wants to confess all this to **Willy**, so that their father will know that Biff is not the man that Willy takes him for. **Happy** advises Biff that it would be better to lie, and to tell Willy that Oliver is thinking the offer over then wait until Willy eventually forgets about it. This way, Happy says, Willy will have something to look forward to.

Willy arrives. **Biff** begins, hesitantly, to tell him what happened. But before he can say much, Willy reveals that he's been fired, and needs some good news for their mother. **Happy** begins to go along with Willy's assumptions about the Oliver meeting, but Biff continues to try to tell his father what really happened when he tried to meet with Oliver.

Willy remembers a young **Bernard** knocking on **Linda**'s door, telling her that Biff has flunked math. Distracted by this memory, Willy ignores Biff's confession and instead tells Biff,

out of the blue, that he shouldn't blame Willy for his failures, since it was Biff who failed math. Not knowing what to make of this, Biff shows Willy the stolen pen as proof of what he did. He and **Happy** are frightened by Willy's delusional behavior.

Trying to calm Willy down, **Biff** falls back on **Happy**'s strategy and lies: he tells Willy that Oliver is going to lend them the money. Willy tells Biff to go back to see Oliver tomorrow, but Biff now says that he's ashamed to go back, having stolen the pen and also, long ago, having stolen some basketballs. Willy accuses him of not wanting to be anything, and Biff retorts that he has already swallowed his pride and gone back to Oliver on behalf of Willy.

Miss Forsythe returns, now with a friend, **Letta**. **Willy**, in a daze, wanders off to the restroom. **Biff** berates **Happy** for not caring enough about Willy. He pulls the rubber hose that he found in the cellar from his pocket and puts it on the table, saying in no uncertain terms that Willy is going to kill himself. He rushes out of the restaurant, upset. Happy hurriedly pays their bill and, embarrassed, tells the girls that Willy isn't really his father, "just a guy." Happy ushers the girls out of the restaurant and after Biff, with Willy still alone in the restroom.

Alone in the restroom, Willy relives the memory of being surprised by **Biff** while he was with The Woman in a hotel room in Boston. The memory begins as Willy and The Woman hear a knock on the door. Willy makes The Woman hide in the bathroom while he opens the door. Biff enters, ashamed, and tells his father that he has just flunked math. He begs Willy to persuade his math teacher to let him pass.

Trying to get **Biff** out of the room, **Willy** pushes him toward the door and agrees to drive back immediately and speak to the teacher. When Biff imitates the teacher's lisp, **The Woman** laughs from the bathroom. She then emerges from the bathroom, wearing only a black slip negligee. Willy pushes her out into the hall, telling Biff that she is an acquaintance of his, a buyer, and that her room was being painted so she had to take a shower in his.

The Woman demands a box of stockings before she leaves. Biff begins to cry. Willy makes a host of excuses before admitting that he was lonely. He promises to talk to the math teacher, but Biff shouts that no one would listen to a "phony little fake" and announces that, anyway, he's decided not to retake math or go to college. He condemns Willy for giving Linda's stockings to his mistress, then runs from the room as Willy cries out after him, ordering him to come back.

Willy emerges from his memory, still in the restroom, as **Stanley** shakes him. He tells Willy that his sons have gone. Willy tries to give Stanley a tip of a dollar, but Stanley slips the bill back into Willy's pocket without Willy noticing.

Willy asks **Stanley** if he knows where he can find a store that sells carrot and pea seeds. Stanley tells him where to go, and Willy hurries off, frantically explaining that he has to move quickly because he doesn't "have a thing in the ground."

Biff and **Happy** return home later that night. Happy has brought a bouquet of roses for **Linda**, but she angrily throws them to the floor. She asks Biff if he cares whether Willy lives or dies, and accuses Happy of spending all his time with "lousy rotten whores." She accuses them of abandoning Willy at the restaurant and demands that both of them pack immediately and get out of the house. Happy denies having abandoned Willy at all, but Biff admits that it is true and describes himself as "scum." Overcome by guilt, Biff searches the house for **Willy**, who, Linda finally tells Biff, is outside obsessively trying to plant seeds despite the darkness.

In the garden, **Willy** is talking with **Ben**, and mentions the $20,000 dollar life insurance policy his family will be entitled to when he is dead. Ben argues that the company may not honor the policy, but Willy scoffs at this idea, saying that the company must honor the policy because he has paid all the premiums. He adds that **Biff** will see how important he is from the number of people at his funeral. Ben counters that his family will think of him as a coward.

Biff enters and takes the hoe out of **Willy**'s hand. He tells Willy that he is leaving and won't be around to fight with Willy any more. They go inside. Willy is still clinging to the notion that Biff has an appointment scheduled with **Oliver**. Biff says he is going to leave and not keep in touch, so Willy won't have to worry about him anymore. Willy responds fiercely that Biff is throwing his life away out of spite.

Biff puts the rubber hose in front of **Willy**, demanding that he answer to it. He tells Willy that he won't be a hero if he commits suicide, and accuses everyone in the house, including himself, of maintaining delusions. He charges **Happy** with making his job title sound more important than it is, and admits that he has gotten fired from every job he has held since high school for stealing. He reveals that for three months he was out of touch he was actually in jail in Kansas City for stealing a suit. He says that all his life he has been too inflated with the self-importance Willy instilled in him to be honest or take orders from anyone.

Biff continues, saying that what he really loves in this world is to be outdoors, and "the work and the food and the time to sit and smoke." He tells **Willy** that he just wants to know himself, and for Willy to know himself. He says that they are both unimportant men, and should stop deluding themselves that they are destined for leadership or greatness. He tells Willy to throw his false, dangerous dreams away. Sobbing, Biff goes upstairs to bed. **Willy**, suddenly in better spirits, comments that **Biff** must really like him to cry over him as he did. **Linda** and **Happy** assure Willy that Biff has always loved him.

Happy goes upstairs. **Linda** follows soon after. **Willy** promises to also come upstairs soon. Alone, now, **Ben** appears to him, and Willy assures Ben that **Biff** will be magnificent one day, once he has twenty thousand dollars in his pocket. The phantom of Ben urges Willy to come into the jungle, and disappears. Willy says goodbye to the house, and gives Biff advice about life in the terms of a football game. Linda calls down to Willy, telling him to come to bed. In response, the car growl to life and drive away, as Linda, Biff, and Happy rush downstairs,.

DEATH OF A SALESMAN: REQUIEM

The only people at **Willy**'s funeral are his family, **Charley** and **Bernard**. Linda is bewildered by the absence of all Willy's business associates, and wonders if everyone else Willy knew blamed him for having committed suicide. Charley comforts her, saying that everyone knows "it's a rough world."

Happy, upset, says that **Willy**'s death was unnecessary. Linda wonders why Willy would kill himself now, when they had nearly paid off all their debts. **Biff** brings up the memory of **Willy** doing craftsman's work around the house, and maintains that more of him went into that work than into his life's work of sales. "He had the wrong dreams," Biff says, and adds that his father didn't know who he was in the way that Biff now knows himself.

Charley delivers an eulogy in **Willy**'s defense. He says that a salesman doesn't do anything concrete like bolting a nut or prescribing medicine, but that all a salesman has is his smile and the trust that people will smile back. When a salesman loses his dreams, Charley says, he is finished.

Biff again says that that their father didn't know who he was, angering **Happy**. When Biff invites Happy to come out west with him, Happy responds that he refuses to be beaten that

easily, and promises to stay in the city and fulfill his father's dream by becoming a top businessman. Biff gives him a hopeless look.

Linda asks for some privacy to say goodbye to **Willy**, and she is left alone at the grave. She can't cry yet, she confesses, because it seems to her as if Willy is just gone on another sales trip. Emotionally, she keeps expecting him to come back. She tells him that she made the last payment on the house that day, and now there will be nobody home. "We're free," she tells him, and begins to cry.

Biff enters, and supporting **Linda**, leads her away. All the characters exit the stage as flute music plays, and the final image is of the apartment buildings that surround the Loman house.

THE SCARLET LETTER

NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

Perspective and Narrator

The Scarlet Letter is told in both the first-person (introductory essay) and the third-person omniscient (the narrative). The narration of the introduction, "The Custom-House," is in the first person, both clearly autobiographical and intensely emotional. The body of *The Scarlet Letter* is told from a third-person omniscient—or all-knowing—point of view, revealing the thoughts and feelings of all characters in great depth.

Tense

The Scarlet Letter is told primarily in the past tense.

About the Title

The scarlet letter is the primary symbol in the novel. The letter initially stands for adultery, but the meanings multiply as the novel progresses. Originating in Hester's punishment, the scarlet letter she must wear as the sign of her sin reoccurs in mysterious manifestations: a sumptuous and fanciful embroidery that displays her talents, her sensitive spirit, and her distance from the habits and tastes of those who condemn her; a meteor blazing across the sky; a painful mark on the skin over Dimmesdale's heart. Eventually the

letter becomes a sign of Hester's redemption, an A for able and angel. Finally these shifts demonstrate the instability of set meaning and an error in assuming that the complexity of human behavior may be summarized in a single term.

Born July 4, 1804, in Salem, Massachusetts, Nathaniel Hathorne Jr. was the first of three children of Elizabeth Manning Hathorne and Nathaniel Hathorne, a sea captain who spent only seven months of a seven-year-long marriage at home in Salem. Thus, Nathaniel Jr. barely knew his father. He became intrigued by a genealogy that included Puritan settlers on both sides. When he learned that John Hathorne, a judge at the Salem Witch Trials of 1692–1693, was one of his forebears, the young man added the *w* to his surname to avoid an infamous association.

After college Hawthorne published anonymous stories in literary journals. In 1837 he collected and published them under his name as *Twice-Told Tales*. His writing career launched, Hawthorne proposed to Sophia Peabody. To save money for the marriage, Hawthorne worked briefly at the Boston Custom House. In 1842 he and Sophia began a long and happy marriage. His money worries, however, continued with the birth of two children and his continuing support of his mother and sisters.

In 1846 Hawthorne published another collection of short stories, *Mosses from an Old Manse*. The stories, though well received, did not bring in enough money, so he took a job at the custom house in Salem in 1846. He called upon this experience for the essay that opens *The Scarlet Letter*, which he wrote after losing that job, while he was in mourning over the death of his mother. The work was influenced by the Transcendentalist movement, an optimistic variation of Romanticism that included such writers and thinkers as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. Transcendentalists embraced individualism, emotion over reason, and nature over science. Hawthorne's optimism was tempered by economic and political realities. His deep interest in the history of New England and the mysteries of the human soul earned him the label "Dark Romantic," along with Herman Melville and Edgar Allan Poe. He is best seen as a keen observer of human nature and one especially accepting of human flaws.

The Scarlet Letter made Hawthorne famous but never earned him much money. Hawthorne also published *The House of the Seven Gables* and *The Snow Image and Other*

Twice-Told Tales (both 1851), the *Blithedale Romance* (1852), and *The Marble Faun* (1860). At Hawthorne's death in 1864, many of America's most celebrated writers gathered to praise him.

Historical Context of *The Scarlet Letter*

The Scarlet Letter paints a very unflattering portrait of the Puritans, a religious group that dominated late seventeenth-century English settlement in Massachusetts. Puritanism began in England during the reign of Queen Elizabeth (1558-1603). The name "Puritanism" came from the group's intent to purify the Church of England by making government and religious practice conform more closely to the word of God. The Puritans were often persecuted in England, and a group of them sailed to the New World on the Mayflower in 1620 in search of a place to practice their religion without interference. Though today Puritans are often thought of as the foundation of American society, Hawthorne criticizes the Puritans' harsh religion and society.

CHARACTERS

Hester Prynne

The protagonist of the novel, Hester is married to **Roger Chillingworth** and has an affair with **Arthur Dimmesdale**. The affair produces a daughter, **Pearl**. Hester plays many roles in *The Scarlet Letter*: devoted mother, abandoned lover, estranged wife, religious dissenter, feminist, and outcast, to name just a few. Perhaps her most important role is that of an iconoclast,one who opposes established conventions. Hester is not just a rebel, she's a glorified rebel, and Hawthorne uses her to criticize the Puritan's strict society. He portrays Hester fondly, as a woman of strength, independence, and kindness, who stands up to the judgments and constraints of her society. Though society tries to demean and disgrace her, Hawthorne emphasizes that Hester never looked more attractive as when she first emerged from prison wearing the scarlet letter.

Pearl

The illegitimate daughter of **Hester Prynne** and **Arthur Dimmesdale**. Pearl serves as a symbolof her mother's shame *and* triumph. At one point the narrator describes Pearl as "the

scarlet letter endowed with life." Like the letter, Pearl is the public consequence of Hester's very private sin. Yet also like the scarlet letter, Pearl becomes Hester's source of strength. Pearl defines Hester's identity and purpose and gives Hester a companion to love. Although she often strugglesto understand Pearl's rebelliousness and devilish spirit, Hester never wavers in her loving devotion to Pearl. Pearl, an outcast, is drawn to other outcasts, such as **Mistress Hibbins** and herwitch friends. Pearl's affinity for the occult associates her character with sin and evil, but Pearl isfirst and foremost a product of love, not just sin. Her rumored happiness and success as an adult in Europe make her character a symbol of the triumph of love over a repressed and oppressive society.

Arthur Dimmesdale

A well respected Boston reverend who has an affair with **Hester Prynne** and is the secret father of **Pearl**. Shy, retiring, and well loved and respected by his public, Dimmesdale is too frightenedand selfish to reveal his sin and bear the burden of punishment with Hester. Yet at the same time, Dimmesdale secretly punishes himself for his sin by fasting and whipping himself. Ultimately the suffering and punishment he endures, though self-inflicted, proves far worse than Hester's or Pearl's, suggesting that betrayal and selfishness are greater sins than adultery. Dimmesdale's guilty conscience overwhelms him like a plague, robbing him of his health and preventing him from raising his daughter. His eventual confession comes too late, and he dies a victim of his own pride.

Roger Chillingworth

The old scholar who **Hester Prynne** met and married before coming to Boston. Chillingworth is a forbidding presence. Even his name reflects his haunting, ice-cold aura. Hester's relationship with Chillingworth, her actual husband, contrasts sharply with her relationship with **Dimmesdale**, her lover. Chillingworth is an older man whom she married for reasons otherthan love. Dimmesdale is a beloved reverend with whom she had an affair out of love and irrepressible desire. Chillingworth recognizes this difference and punishes Hester and Dimmesdale covertly by tormenting Dimmesdale almost to the point of killing him. Meanwhile, he hypocritically makes Hester swear not to reveal his true identity as her husband in order to avoid the humiliation of being associated with their scandalous affair. In

the end, by tormenting Dimmesdale, Chillingworth transforms himself into a sick and twisted man, a kind of fiend.

The Narrator

The unnamed narrator is inspired to write *The Scarlet Letter* after discovering the scarlet letter and fragments of its story in an attic of the Custom House. He describes the novel as a tale of "human frailty and sorrow" and encourages the reader to heed its moral. Throughout the novel, the narrator favors **Hester** against the Puritans who persecute her. His writing often reads as if he's pained to have to tell such a sad story that involves the downfall of innocent victims at thehands of an oppressive society.

Mistress Hibbins

Governor Bellingham's sister. She invites **Hester** to a witches' meeting in the woods and becomes the object of **Pearl**'s fascination. She speaks often of the "Black Man," another name for the Devil. She is executed for practicing witchcraft about a year after Dimmesdale dies. Herdeath shows how merciless Puritan society had become in the name of piety and propriety: the Governor would even order the execution of his own sister.

Governor Bellingham

The governor of Boston and the brother of **Mistress Hibbins**. Bellingham conducts himself likean aristocrat, enjoying money, luxury, and the privileges of power. Yet when it comes to the actions of others, Governor Bellingham punishes any behavior that does not fit with the strict Puritan rules of behavior. This makes him a hard-hearted hypocrite. For instance, even while employing **Hester** to do fancy needlepoint for him, he tries to take **Pearl** from her, arguing that as an adulterer she's an unfit mother. Later, he convicts and executes his own sister of practicingwitchcraft.

The Scarlet Letter: The Custom House

A nameless **narrator** (who has a similar biography to Hawthorne) describes his job as chief executive officer of a Custom House, the place where taxes were paid on imported goods. The narrator describes his Custom House colleagues as "wearisome old souls" and Salem, the town where it was located, as old and run-down. One rainy day, the **narrator** discovered a peculiar package in the upstairs storage area of the Custom House. The package contained a piece of fabric with a **red letter** "A" affixed to it along with several pages

explaining the history of the letter. The narrator says this discovery formed the core of the story that he will now tell in *The Scarlet Letter*. The **narrator** mentions that he's since lost his job at the Custom House. He draws a distinction between his "figurative self," whom the public would expect to be dismayed by the lost job, and the "real human being" who welcomed the changes in his life that allowed him to become "again a literary man." The narrator says he now has the time to write *The Scarlet Letter*,a story he feels obligated to tell the world. He hopes to make his own mark as a writer and be remembered as a "scribbler of bygone days."

Chapter 1

A crowd of men and women assembles near a dilapidated wooden prison. The **narrator** remarksthat the founders of every new settlement have always sought first to build a prison and a graveyard. He adds that this particular prison was most likely built upon the founding of Boston and describes prisons as the "**black** flower of civilized society." Next to the prison door stands a blooming wild **rose bush**. The narrator imagines that perhaps the rose bush grows in such an unlikely place to offer comfort to prisoners entering the jail and forgiveness from Nature to thoseleaving it to die on the scaffold. The narrator describes the **rose bush** as sitting on the threshold of the story he plans to tell. He then plucks one of the rose blossoms and offers it to the reader. He describes the gesture and the blossom as a symbol of the moral that the reader might learn inreading his "tale of human frailty and sorrow."

Chapter 2

The crowd outside the prison grows restless waiting for **Hester Prynne** to appear. The faces in the crowd are grim, yet familiar, since Puritans gathered often to watch criminals be punished. The narrator says that the Puritans considered religion and law to be almost identical. Some of the Puritan women waiting outside the prison say **Hester** deserved a harsher sentence. One statesthat **Revered Dimmesdale**, Hester's pastor, must be ashamed that a member of his congregation committed such an awful sin. Another says that Hester should have been executed for her sin. **Hester** exits the prison holding a three month-old infant. The prison guard puts a hand on her shoulder, but she shrugs him off and goes out alone, with "natural dignity," looking proud, radiant, and beautiful. On her chest **Hester** wears a **scarlet letter** "A," affixed with beautiful embroidery that strikes some women in the crowd as

inappropriate. The narrator describes the letter in detail, noting that its "fertility" and "gorgeous luxuriance" pushed it beyond the Puritans' boundaries of acceptable dress. **Hester** is tall, with a head of dark glossy hair, and a beautiful face with deeply set **black** eyes. She has a lady-like dignity, which the narrator says never was more powerfulor beautiful than when she emerged from prison. As the crowd stares at **Hester**, the crowd focuses on the **scarlet letter**, which transfixes everyone. The letter sets Hester apart, enclosing her in "a sphere by herself" outside the watching crowd. As part of her punishment, **Hester** must stand before the crowd on the scaffold for several hours. Her walk to the scaffold is inwardly agonizing, though Hester never reveals her suffering. The narrator observes that once upon the scaffold, the beautiful Hester took on the image of "Divine Maternity," and yet her beauty also had the "taint of deepest sin." **Governor Bellingham**, a judge, and other officials observe the "spectacle" of Hester's punishment on the scaffold. The crowd, aware of the presence of authority, remains serious and grave. **Hester** feels the urge to scream at the crowd and leap off the scaffold, but she restrains herself. **Hester** thinks about her past in order to endure her time on the scaffold. Lost in reminiscence, the harrowing scene before her eyes seems to vanish. Hester thinks about her youth spent in poverty in England. She envisions her parents' faces and sees also the face of a "misshapen scholar," her husband.

Finally **Hester**'s thoughts return to the present. She looks out at the menacing crowd assembled before her. Hester touches the **scarlet letter** and squeezes her baby, **Pearl**, so tightly that Pearl cries. Hester then realizes that the letter and her baby are her only reality.

Chapter 3

Suddenly as Hester looks out into the crowd she recognizes Roger Chillingworth, her husband, standing beside an Indian at the edge of the crowd. She clutches her baby in alarm. It cries out inChillingworth's face becomes horrified when protest. Chillingworth is "civilized and savage." He is small, intelligent looking, and somewhat deformed, with one shoulder higher than the other. he sees that the woman on the scaffold is **Hester**, his wife. Chillingworth and Hester's eyes lock. He quickly places his fingers to his lips to silence her. **Chillingworth** asks a man about **Hester**'s identity and crime. The man is surprised Chillingworth hasn't heard about Hester's notorious sin. Chillingworth lies that he's been held captive by Indians. He asks the man to explain Hester's crime. The stranger tells Hester's history. She had been married to a scholar

from England (**Chillingworth**), but had arrived in Massachusetts alone while he remained in Amsterdam. She lived alone in Boston for two years before falling into sin and scandal. **Chillingworth** asks who fathered **Hester**'s child. The man says that the child's father remains a mystery and suggests that Hester's husband come from Europe to investigate the matter himself. The man also notes that Hester did not receive the full "extremity of righteous law," which would have punished her with death. Chillingworth says Hester's sentence makes more sense because now Hester will serve as Mr. Wilson, an elderly local reverend, addresses Hester and calls on her pastor, Arthur Dimmesdale, to question her about her sin. Dimmesdale demands that she reveal the identity of her baby's father, but she says she will never reveal his name. Mr. Wilson then delivers a fiery sermon about sin, after which Hester returns to her prison cell.

Chapter 4

When **Hester** and **Pearl** return to prison, Pearl cries uncontrollably. The prison guards allow a doctor in to help calm her. Posing as a physician, **Roger Chillingworth** enters and gives healing concoctions to **Pearl** and **Hester**. Hester fears Chillingworth might actually be poisoning her, but drinks his remedy. **Chillingworth** forgives **Hester** for betraying him. He asks her to tell him the identity of the father, but once again she refuses. He then asks Hester to protect his identity by swearing never to identify him as her husband. Hester remains suspicious of Chillingworth and thinks she might be sealing her own doom by agreeing to keep his secret, but does it anyway.

Chapter 5

About three years pass. **Hester**, now free from prison, decides not to leave Boston. She takes **Pearl** to live in an abandoned cabin on the outskirts of town. **Hester** supports herself as a seamstress. The same people who pay her for her work, including **Governor Bellingham**, continue to shun her. **Hester** grows increasingly lonely. **Pearl**, her only companion, is a constant reminder of the source of her alienation: sin. Hester is determined to keep the meaning of the **scarlet letter** a secret from Pearl.

Chapter 6

The **narrator** describes **Pearl** as the human manifestation of **Hester**'s sin: Pearl is filled with asense of defiance and deviance, and does not fit in among the other children of

the community. Like **Hester**, **Pearl** is painfully aware of her isolation. She has an innate sense that Hester's **scarlet letter** is linked to their rejection by society. She pleads with her mother to explain the letter's origin. The townspeople consider Pearl the physical embodiment of sin, an"imp of evil."

Chapter 7

Rumors surface that the authorities are planning to take **Pearl** from **Hester** because they fear that Pearl is possessed and dangerous to Hester. And if Pearl isn't possessed, they think she deserves a less sinful mother. **Hester** goes to visit **Governor Bellingham** to inquire about these rumors and to deliver a pair of gloves that she has sewn for him. Children taunt Hester and **Pearl** on their walk to the Governor's. Pearl fends them off. They arrive and find the **Governor**'s residence decorated with armor and dark formal portraits, relics from Bellingham's English roots. At one point, **Pearl** points out **Hester**'s distorted reflection in the breastplate of a suit of armor: Hester appears to be completely hidden behind the **scarlet letter**. Hester seems to feel Pearl's distance as they gaze in the mirror, and she again suspects that Pearl might be possessed by demons. **Pearl** spots a garden with soil too hard to support the "ornamental gardening" popular in England, but which contains some rose bushes. Pearl begs for a rose just as
the **Governor** approaches with other gentleman.

Chapter 8

John Wilson, **Chillingworth** and **Dimmesdale** arrive at the **Governor**'s residence. The men tease **Pearl**, calling her a demon-child because of her scarlet clothing, but stop when they realize that she's **Hester**'s daughter and that Hester must be present. The **Governor** asks **Hester** how she can justify keeping **Pearl**. Hester says she'll teach Pearl what she's learned from wearing the **scarlet letter**. The Governor says that the letter is her badge of shame. **Mr. Wilson** asks **Pearl** who made her. Pearl says that she was plucked from the **rose bush** just outside the prison door. The **Governor**, alarmed by this response, suggests that they conduct acloser investigation into Hester's fitness as a mother. Hester says she will die before giving up **Pearl**. **Hester** begs **Dimmesdale** to defend her. Dimmesdale argues that **Pearl** was sent by God to serve as Hester's one true punishment and to guard her from sinning again. He points outthat Hester even dresses Pearl in red, likening her to the **scarlet letter**. **Chillingworth** notes that **Dimmesdale** spoke with an unusual

amount of passion and conviction. **Pearl** approaches **Dimmesdale** and grasps his hand. She then runs down the hall. **Mr. Wilson** remarks that, like a witch, her feet barely touch the ground. **Dimmesdale**'s speech convinces the **Governor** not to take **Pearl** from **Hester**. On their way out of the Governor's residence, Hester and Pearl see **Mistress Hibbins**. She invites Hester to a witches' gathering in the woods with the Black Man, but Hester declines, saying she must care for Pearl.

Chapter 9

The Boston settlement lacks skilled physicians, so the Puritans welcome **Chillingworth** enthusiastically for his apparent knowledge of both traditional medicine and Indian medical remedies. **Dimmesdale**'s health worsens and he is seen often with his hand over his heart. **Chillingworth** treats Dimmesdale and soon the two move in together. As **Dimmesdale**'s health wanes, the locals notice that **Chillingworth**'s has transformed from a kind, elderly, and somewhat misshapen gentleman into an ugly evil old man. The transformation makes them suspect that Chillingworth's intentions in getting so close to Dimmesdale might not be entirely charitable: they fear he might have been sent by the devil.

Chapter 10

While serving as **Dimmesdale**'s "leech" (a term for a doctor) **Chillingworth** begins to suspect that Dimmesdale's condition may stem from stress caused by some kind of secret. He tries to find out this secret, but Dimmesdale refuses to divulge it. One day, Chillingworth and Dimmesdale notice **Hester** and **Pearl** in the cemetery outside Dimmesdale's home. Pearl is playing on the headstones and attaching burrs to Hester's **scarlet letter**. **Pearl** throws one of the burrs she is carrying toward **Dimmesdale**. She tells **Hester** that they should leave since the Black Man has possessed Dimmesdale and will get them too. **Dimmesdale**'s health gets worse. Chillingworth attributes his illness to his secret, but Dimmesdale still refuses to reveal it. When Dimmesdale falls asleep, Chillingworth pushes aside Dimmesdale's shirt and sees something there that gives him joy. The narrator likens Chillingworth's touch to Satan stealing a soul.

Chapter 11

Convinced that **Dimmesdale** is **Pearl**'s father, **Chillingworth** embarks on a campaign

to make his patient as miserable as possible. Dimmesdale continues to suffer greatly and comes to hate Chillingworth for mistreating him. **Dimmesdale** continues to preach and delivers some of his most passionate sermons, which focus mostly on the topic of sin. He describes himself as a "pollution and a lie" to his parishioners, yet he does not confess and they continue to view him favorably. **Dimmesdale**'s guilt makes him hate himself. He punishes himself physically and emotionally, staying up nights thinking about confessing, and starving and whipping himself. Hishealth crumbles, as does his sense of self. As the narrator observes, "To the untrue man, the whole universe is false." Yet the chapter ends with the suggestion that Dimmesdale has come up with a plan that might help him ease his suffering.

Chapter 12

One night, **Dimmesdale** mounts the town scaffold where **Hester** and **Pearl** once stood to be shamed. He imagines the scene filled with townspeople. He cries out in anguish, but **Mr. Wilson**, who was walking by in the distance, doesn't see Dimmesdale. **Hester** and **Pearl**, returning from the deathbed of the colony's first governor, do spot **Dimmesdale**, and join him on the scaffold. Her eyes alive with "witchcraft," Pearl asks Dimmesdale to appear on the scaffold with them in front of everyone. Dimmesdale says he will only do that on "judgment day." A meteor lights up the sky in what **Dimmesdale** thinks is the shape of an

"A." **Pearl** notices **Chillingworth** watching them. Chillingworth, looking like an "arch-fiend," urges Dimmesdale to get down from the scaffold. He and Dimmesdale return home. The next day **Dimmesdale** delivers his most powerful sermon ever. Afterward, the church sexton returns to Dimmesdale a **black** glove he found on the scaffold, saying Satan must have left it there. Hementions that other townspeople reported seeing a letter "A" formed by a meteor, which they took to stand for "angel" and to mean the dead governor has ascended to heaven.

Chapter 13

Seven years have now passed since Pearl's birth. Hester has become more accepted by the community, and the embroidered scarlet letter has evolved into a "symbol of her calling," notjust her sin. Nonetheless, Hester still lives on the outskirts of town, her hard life has stolen herbeauty and spirit, and she now dwells in the realm of thought and solitude, not passion. She doubts whether her own life is worth living, and contemplates murdering Pearl and then committing suicide. Hester decides that she must help Dimmesdale by confessing that Chillingworth was her husband, thereby revealing the vengeful motive behind his harshtreatment of Dimmesdale.

Chapter 14

Hester decides to ask **Chillingworth** to stop tormenting Dimmesdale. When she and Pearl encounter him on a beach near the sea, he tells her the council has recently discussed allowing her to remove the **scarlet letter** from her chest. She says the letter should stay until she's worthy of its removal. **Hester** notices that **Chillingworth** has changed. He's now a wretched, vengeful old man. Chillingworth also notes the change, remembering when he was a kind scholar. He saysthat he's lost his "human heart." **Hester** tells **Chillingworth** he holds **Dimmesdale**'s life in his hands. Chillingworth says he saved Dimmesdale's life by not revealing his link to Hester from the start. Hester says he would be better off dead than forced to endure Chillingworth's torture.

Chillingworth admits that he's become a "fiend." He blames **Hester** for his downfall. Hester agrees, pleading with Chillingworth therefore not to blame and abuse **Dimmesdale** any further.**Hester** says she must tell **Dimmesdale** about **Chillingworth**. He responds that their fate, a "black flower," is no longer in anyone's hands. He apologizes to Hester for not having offered her the love that would have prevented their collective ruin.

Chapter 15

As **Chillingworth** departs, Hester thinks that though it's a sin, she hates Chillingworth for tricking her into thinking she'd be happy as his wife. She rejoins **Pearl** by the seaside. Pearl hasarranged seaweed to form a letter "A" on her own chest. She pleads with **Hester** to tell her what the scarlet letter means, and asks if Hester wears it for the same reason

Dimmesdale covers his heart with his hand. **Hester** lies and says she wears the letter because of its beautiful gold thread. **Pearl**, knowing better, seeks the real reason, and Hester threatens to punish her.

Chapter 16

Hester plans to intercept **Dimmesdale** along a forest path as he returns to Boston on his way back from visiting an apostle. As **Hester** waits for **Dimmesdale**, **Pearl** asks to hear the story of the Black Man, a nickname for the devil. Pearl adds that the Black Man haunts the forest with a book that his converts must sign in blood. The Black Man then places a mark on his followers' bosoms. **Hester** asks how **Pearl** heard this story and she responds that an old woman told her theBlack Man put the **scarlet letter** on her mother. Eager to settle the matter, Hester confirms the false story of the letter's origin. **Dimmesdale** approaches. He appears weak, and walks with his hand over his heart, where **Pearl** suspects the Black Man has also left his mark.

Chapter 17

Hester and **Dimmesdale** meet in the forest and hold hands. Dimmesdale says life with a **scarletletter** would be preferable to his life of deception, since Hester is the only person with whom hecan be himself. The rest is emptiness, falsehood, and death. **Hester** reveals to **Dimmesdale** that **Chillingworth** was her husband. Dimmesdale, furious, blames her for his suffering. But he then forgives her and says Chillingworth's sin was far worse than theirs. **Dimmesdale** says living under **Chillingworth**'s control is worse than death, but he sees no way out. **Hester** tells him to consider a life beyond Boston, in the safety and anonymity of Europe. **Dimmesdale** says he lacks the strength and courage to venture out alone. Hester says hewouldn't have to go alone.

Chapter 18

Dimmesdale decides to flee Boston with **Hester**. He calls her his "angel" and says he's beenrenewed. Hester flings away her **scarlet letter** and feels an enormous swell of relief. **Dimmesdale** and **Hester** discuss **Pearl**, whom Hester says she barely understands. Pearl, meanwhile, has been playing alone in the forest, where she fits in well among the wild animals.Hester calls her to come meet Dimmesdale, her father.

Chapter 19

Dimmesdale says he feared that **Pearl**'s resemblance to him would give away his secret—the narrator says Pearl is a "living hieroglyphic." Yet Pearl refuses to come to her parents when theycall. **Hester** attributes her reluctance to the absence of the **scarlet letter** on her bosom. Hester puts the letter back on and Pearl accepts her. **Pearl** asks if **Dimmesdale** will return with them hand in hand to town. **Hester** says he won't join them in public yet. Dimmesdale kisses Pearl. She runs to the brook to wash off his kiss.

Chapter 20

Hester and **Dimmesdale** agree to flee with **Pearl** to Europe. As Hester makes plans for them to leave on a ship bound for England in four days, Dimmesdale feels changes coming over him, including the urge to speak blasphemously to strangers. He encounters **Mistress Hibbins**. Shesuggests they go to see the Black Man. At home, **Dimmesdale** tells **Chillingworth** that the "free air" outside has done him so much good that he no longer needs the help of his medications. Chillingworth suspects instead that Dimmesdale talked with **Hester**, but feigns relief that his remedies have finally helped restore Dimmesdale's health. **Dimmesdale** throws the draft of his most important sermon into the fire and starts from scratch.

Chapter 21

It's inauguration day for the new governor. **Hester** and **Pearl** await the procession of governmentofficials, and stand near a bunch of Indians ("painted barbarians") and some crew members ("desperadoes") from the vessel that **Hester** will board with **Dimmesdale**. The **narrator** remarks that the Puritan style of celebration lacks the grandness and gaiety that events like this had in England**Chillingworth** walks over to and converses with the commander of the vessel bound for England. The commander leaves his side and walks by **Hester**. He recognizes her and says that Chillingworth will also be aboard the ship. Hester looks across the crowd and sees Chillingworthsmile menacingly at her.

Chapter 22

Dimmesdale appears in the procession of officials and looks more energetic than ever before. **Pearl** barely recognizes him as the man who kissed her in the forest. **Hester**

tells Pearl

not to mention the forest in the town. When Hester and Dimmesdale see each other no gesture of recognition passes between them. Hester fears that the bond she felt had been restored in the forest was an illusion. **Mistress Hibbins** approaches **Hester**. She says she can always tell a servant of the Black Man, and that both Hester and **Dimmesdale** are such servants. Hibbins alsocompares Hester's **scarlet letter** to Dimmesdale's habit of covering his heart. **Pearl** asks **Mistress Hibbins** if she has seen what lies beneath **Dimmesdale**'s hand. MistressHibbins invites her to ride to see the Black Man (who she calls Pearl's father) to learn what Dimmesdale conceals. Some Indians standing in the gathered crowd think **Hester**'s **scarlet letter** is a mark of distinction.

Chapter 23

Dimmesdale awes the crowd with a powerful sermon that predicts Puritan New England will flourish as a chosen land of God. The crowd thinks that Dimmesdale's performance is made evenmore powerful by the weakness that has once again settled on him and made it clear he was verging on death. After his triumphant sermon, **Dimmesdale** sees **Hester** and **Pearl** in front of the scaffold. He asks them to approach him at the scaffold. **Chillingworth** warns Dimmesdale not to "**blacken**" his fame. On the scaffold, **Dimmesdale** turns to **Hester** and says: "Is this not better than what we dreamed of in the forest?" He tells her God is merciful, and begs her to let him take responsibility for his shame. Supported by Hester and **Pearl**, Dimmesdale turns to thecrowd and announces that he is guilty of the same sin for which they have punished Hester.

As **Chillingworth** looks on in despair, Dimmesdale tears away his clothing to reveal a **scarlet letter** carved into his breast. **Dimmesdale** falls to the floor and asks **Pearl** for a kiss. She kisses him and cries, and narrator says her tears were**Hester** tells Dimmesdale they will meet again in the afterlife. Though Dimmesdale is not so sure, he dies crying out that God is merciful and thanking Him for putting him through the terrible trials and ordeals that led to this moment, his confession. The watching crowd murmurs in awe. a pledge that "she would grow up amid humanjoy and sorrow, nor forever do battle with the world, but be a woman in it."

Chapter 24

People came up with various explanations for the origin of **Dimmesdale**'s **scarlet letter**. Some thought Dimmesdale carved it himself, as a penance. Others that **Chillingworth**, through magic poisons, brought it into being. Still others thought it developed naturally, from remorse. The town authorities stated that there had been no letter on his skin at all, and that Dimmesdale confessed not for a personal sin, but simply to teach his flock that all men are born sinners.

The **narrator** says the story he's told has one moral: be true, and show the world your worst, orat the least, "some trait whereby the worst may be inferred." After **Dimmesdale**'s death, **Chillingworth** lost his vitality and died within a year, leaving **Pearl** a share of his property in England and New England. No one knew for sure what happened to Pearl, but clues point to her having married a man, for love, in Europe. **Hester** returned years later to her cabin inBoston. She lived there for many years before her death and still wore the **scarlet letter**, which had taken on its own legend over time. She was buried next to **Dimmesdale**. Their shared tombstone bore a single scarlet letter on a field of black.

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