

Goody Hibbins

SCENE 1

A man—ROGER CHILLINGWORTH—emerges from the crowd, watching. He approaches a woman, GOODY HIBBINS, wrapped up heavily in black and white wool, who has been watching. Goody Hibbins herself is pregnant. The last rings repeat, then fade. We see the man struck by something—did he catch Hester's eye? He is frozen—then looks away. Goody Hibbins notices—Chillingworth covers.

Start

CHILLINGWORTH

Pardon me, Goodwife—why is that woman set up to public shame?

GOODY HIBBINS

(Eyeing him) You must be newly-arrived to this colony, sir! Else you would have heard much of Hester Prynne.

CHILLINGWORTH

I am—as you say—a stranger here.

What has this Mistress Prynne done, to merit such punishment?

GOODY HIBBINS

Yon woman has no husband! She was married, once, to a learned man of the old country, who sent her before him to Boston—but no tidings have come of him for two years.

And yet she is with child.

CHILLINGWORTH

Who was her partner in this crime?

GOODY HIBBINS

She has not confessed his name—and no surprise!

CHILLINGWORTH

No?

GOODY HIBBINS

The magistrates are too lenient! The whore ought to be paraded through town naked. They should brand her forehead! And if she still does not give up the name, she ought to hang!

There is law for it, both in Scripture and the statute-book.

But men go soft for a beautiful woman.

CHILLINGWORTH

Not in my experience.

The joke falls remarkably flat.

GOODY HIBBINS

(Frostily) Is that—a joke?

CHILLINGWORTH

A sad attempt at one.

He half-laughs at himself, almost grimly; she stares at him.

GOODY HIBBINS

(She'll let it slide JUST THIS ONCE) —You are unfamiliar with our ways, sir. But this is the shining city on the hill. We forge God's own country, here—and it is no laughing matter.

~~CHILLINGWORTH~~

— END

~~(He nods his head, conceding) I shall remember it.~~

Goody Hibbins turns her eyes back to the gallows.

~~GOODY HIBBINS~~

~~The magistrates should learn strength, lest their own wives go astray.~~

Chillingworth scrapes his hat off, bows, and begins to move away.

~~CHILLINGWORTH~~

~~My profound thanks to you—~~

~~GOODY HIBBINS~~

~~Goodwife Hibbins:~~

~~He bows~~

~~And your name, sir:~~

~~—~~

~~Chillingworth has melted away.~~

Gov. Hibbins

SCENE 2

The prison. It is a dim, dark, awful place. Some months later.

Hester, no longer pregnant, sits next to a cradle. She is wearing a cloak that covers her chest.

GOVERNOR HIBBINS, *the ruffled and wealthy governor of Massachusetts Bay Colony, speechifies at her.*

Start

GOVERNOR HIBBINS

—I tell you, there are factions in this colony that would see you hang for it!

HESTER

Governor Hibbins, my child is not well.

GOVERNOR HIBBINS

(Beginning his speech) You know, Hester Prynne—

HESTER

She does not feed aright, nor sleep soundly, nor thrive—

GOVERNOR HIBBINS

You know, Hester Prynne—

HESTER

I have asked for a wet-nurse to advise me, but—!

GOVERNOR HIBBINS

(Stamping his foot a little) PEACE, WOMAN. ME FIRST!

She is silenced. He musters his dignity, and re-begins his speech.

You know, Hester Prynne, that I represent civil authority in this land, which was granted to us by God himself. I, in all humility, am the highest man in this colony—but even I am obedient! I serve my God and King, as my subjects are sworn to serve me—because to oppose this system is to rebel against Providence itself!

Do you think you are better than your neighbors?

Better than—me?

HESTER

Sir, I do not.

GOVERNOR HIBBINS

And yet you alone defy divine order!

Give me his name!

HESTER

Sir, I cannot.

GOVERNOR HIBBINS

—You have sat in this prison for months. Do you wish to sit for years?

She looks at him; the baby makes a sound and she re-attends.

GOVERNOR HIBBINS

Simply give me his name.

HESTER

(Shaking her head again) Sir, I will—

GOVERNOR HIBBINS

—“Sir, I will not.”

We did not enter this new country alone, Mistress. The devil is here, too, and He is always working to drag us down. Are you on The Strange Man’s side, or ours? Who, exactly, are you protecting?

She does not respond.

Good Master Dimmesdale!

She looks up—a man steps into the little cell. This is REVEREND DIMMESDALE. Dimmesdale looks ill.

Reason with this foolish woman.

A pause. Hester looks at Dimmesdale.

— END

~~**DIMMESDALE**~~

~~Hester Prynne—~~

~~As your—spiritual leader, I charge you to say the name.~~

~~*She looks at him.*~~

~~Do not be silent from—pity or—or tenderness for the man, for believe me, it is better to languish in captivity than to live free with a guilty heart.~~

~~**HESTER**~~

~~—Is it?~~

~~**DIMMESDALE**~~

~~—God has granted you an open shame, that you may someday have an open triumph over your sin! How can you deny to him—who may not have the courage to grasp it—the cup now at your lips?~~

~~Please.~~

~~*Beat.*~~

~~**HESTER**~~

~~*(Turning her eyes to the Governor)* My child has no father.~~

~~Save a heavenly one.~~

Chillingworth

He drops his hand.

CHILLINGWORTH

Describe, then.

HESTER

There is—a burning. Sometimes even—blood.

CHILLINGWORTH

Sucking her mother's blood along with the milk.

The baby makes a choking gasping sound.

Nasty little imp.

The baby makes another tiny, slightly gremlin-ish, punctuating sound.

Cabbage leaves.

HESTER

What?

CHILLINGWORTH

There is swelling? Cabbage leaves, on the—you know.

~~I will have some brought. And I can give you a draught for the~~

~~path.~~

Start → *He begins preparing something.*

She will grow out of the screaming. Unless something is—truly wrong with her.

HESTER

What do you mean?

CHILLINGWORTH

They say that a child born of sin, carries evil within its nature.

Does she seem... strange to you, Hester?

Pause. He holds out the medicine.

HESTER

—When did you learn to make physick?

CHILLINGWORTH

I developed many skills, in my travels.

HESTER

Your travels where?

He doesn't answer; she bats his hand away, almost spilling the liquid.

Where?

CHILLINGWORTH

/Careful.

HESTER

/(Getting very upset) Where have you been?!

CHILLINGWORTH

No, no, my dear—

He puts down the cup, carefully.

—I'm the one who gets to ask questions.

HESTER

Your name—why are you here under false pretenses—

CHILLINGWORTH

Shall I call myself Prynne, and be your husband, and come home to such a happy end?

HESTER

I thought you were dead!

He laughs a little.

—That your ship was—at the bottom of the sea! There was no word in two years!

CHILLINGWORTH

And how truly you mourned.

—Who is the man, Hester?

HESTER

—I know that I have wronged you.

CHILLINGWORTH

And yet you may be redeemed!

If you will give me his name.

HESTER

—I cannot.

CHILLINGWORTH

You “cannot?”

HESTER

—I will not.

Beat. Chillingworth holds out the liquid again.

CHILLINGWORTH

Drink this.

She hesitates.

CHILLINGWORTH

—Oh, please. Give me a little credit.

She still won't take it.

PEARL

SCENE 5

Start →

A clearing, outside of Hester's small cottage. Four years later. Hester still wears the great scarlet A. She has a bundle of fabric in her arms—maybe it even comes out of the bundle that used to contain the baby.

HESTER

Pearl? Pearl?!!

You are supposed to be looking at your prayer book!!!

A wild, impish little laugh—almost nasty.

(At the end of her rope) Pearl!!!

A rustle. Hester plays along.

~~Oh no, I have lost her. Was she living alone in a cottage in the cold dark woods, for the rest of my days, like the witch in the story.~~

~~*Another evil-sounding little giggle.*~~

~~Too bad. I was going to boil some sorrows, and give any children around the town to play with. *(No response)* And then I was going to sing songs with them. *(A derogatory noise)* And then I was going to give these children some slices of cornbread. *(A snarl)* Clattered with honey. *(A snarl)* Lots and lots of honey.~~

PEARL

I AM THE CHILDREN!

Pearl pops out of the wilderness. She's about 4 years old. Hair going every which way, covered with twigs and dirt—clad only in her shift. She's waving a big nasty stick.

HESTER

But you are not my Pearl.

PEARL

Yes!

HESTER

No, for my little Pearl was clean when I last saw her, and clothed.

PEARL

(Using a monster voice) I AM YOUR LITTLE PEARL!

HESTER

Do not use that terrible voice, you know I do not like it.

PEARL

(Monster voice) I like it.

Hester takes hold of her and begins to re-dress her; the bundle she was holding is Pearl's dress. Pearl does not like it, but submits.

HESTER

You cannot run about in your shift.

PEARL

Why?

HESTER

(Struggling to get her clothed and human again) Because it is not--decent.

PEARL

Why?

HESTER

Because God says only animals may be naked without shame.

PEARL

Then I will be an animal.

She growls and snarls.

HESTER

Pearl!

Pearl howls.

Pick up your feet.

She stomps; Hester sighs in irritation.

You must be a little more obedient! Listen, and learn!

PEARL

Why?

HESTER

Because you do not yet know the ways of the world.

PEARL

I know EVERY-THING.

Hester stops a moment, seriously, then looks at her, shakes it off, holds her face.

HESTER

Strange child.

Pearl, for a moment, stands still and smiles—she reaches for the letter on Hester's chest. Hester pulls away.

PEARL

Mother—I want a red letter for my chest.

HESTER

(Horrified) No, you don't.

PEARL

May I have one when I am grown?!

SCENE 12

Dimmesdale is kneeling in front of the little altar again. His back is truly bloody now—he has really scourged himself raw. Hester enters.

HESTER

—Reverend?

He starts up, and pulls on a shirt, turning away.

Your back—

DIMMESDALE

It is nothing.

Taking in the flail, the blood. Beat.

HESTER

What have you been doing to yourself?

Beat.

DIMMESDALE

Mistress Prynne—how—can I help you, today?

HESTER

Reverend Dimmesdale—I.

She hesitates, then carefully closes the door behind her. They stand in tense silence—

I am.

I am come to tell you—you should stop taking any physick the doctor gives you.

DIMMESDALE

(This is the last thing he expected) What?—Why?

HESTER

He does not have your best interests at heart.

Beat.

DIMMESDALE

Hester. I think that I am dying.

HESTER

—That's not true.

DIMMESDALE

Only because Chillingworth keeps me alive!

And I am not afraid to die—that's not true; I am, I am afraid of everything—but I am more frightened, of what will come after.

Stewt —

HESTER

You will soon be well again, if you will just get away from him!

DIMMESDALE

What do you mean?

HESTER

He makes you sick!

DIMMESDALE

My sins make me sick.

HESTER

You should not trust his counsel!

DIMMESDALE

Why?

Beat.

HESTER

He is my husband!

DIMMESDALE

...Chillingworth?

HESTER

Prynne.

Beat.

DIMMESDALE

—But- he is my friend.

HESTER

-No; he's not.

DIMMESDALE

...I have trusted him implicitly—I let him lay hands on me, I have drunk every draught he has ever given me without question!

HESTER

—You should stop doing that.

DIMMESDALE

I told him—everything about me!

Except—Hester. I never told him about—

HESTER

He knows. Now, he knows.

DIMMESDALE

And—are you -are you and he *(he makes a gesture that signifies together)*

HESTER

No!

DIMMESDALE

Then why didn't you warn me?

HESTER

He made me promise, years ago. Threatened Pearl's safety, if I told.
And you—of all people—know I excel at keeping a secret.

Beat.

DIMMESDALE

Are you putting yourself at risk, by telling me?

HESTER

I am always at risk.

But I am done with living under his sufferance.

DIMMESDALE

What do you mean?

HESTER

I have saved money, bit by bit, over the years—I am going to leave,
and bring Pearl with me.

DIMMESDALE

Where?

HESTER

Back across the sea. The old country, maybe. There must be some
place.

Dimmesdale nods, slumps. Looks at her.

DIMMESDALE

I—I hope that you can finally find peace.

Pause.

HESTER

Can you?

DIMMESDALE

Oh, I do not deserve it.

The people trust me to bless their infants, to close the eyes of the
dying, to handle their salvation—and I do so with unclean hands.
I am sick in my heart, and who knows but I spread my illness to
them, too?

I betray them every moment. I have never stopped betraying—since
I betrayed you.

She stares at him, unmoving.

END

~~I should have stood with you, Hester. I told myself that it was no
help to you if I were also exposed, that I could save no one if I was~~

Hester

~~ruined, that if I gave myself up I could not redeem myself through
good deeds. But every coward has his reasons.~~

~~God sees my hypocrisy, and has turned all my former joys into
sorrows, and it is just.~~

D: He shall never forgive me.

Start ←

He looks away from her. Long beat.

HESTER

—What if I could forgive you?

DIMMESDALE

How could—

HESTER

To free you. To free myself!

I do not want you to suffer, that gives me no satisfaction! It does not help me, or my child!

I don't want to— to do this, any more!

She starts pulling off the scarlet letter—attacking it, ripping it off stitch by stitch.

DIMMESDALE

Hester— Stop!—You can't remove it!

HESTER

Why? Will I be struck down?! *(Laughing)* Look! Where are the lightning bolts?!!

DIMMESDALE

Stop

HESTER

I don't believe anymore, that God wants me to wear this! I don't believe he wants you to scourge yourself into the grave!

DIMMESDALE

Hester—

HESTER

This is not divine justice, this is man's law! They are different!

She has the letter off. She holds it out to him.

The gift of this letter has been to set me apart. To let me understand that you can survive, outside the bounds of the city on the hill! To show me that to be judged, is not to be guilty!! I did not know the weight—until I felt the freedom!

That which they meant to be poison, was physick to me—and I see now, that men create these fears: Satan at the gates, a Strange

man in the woods, divine wrath—to put us in bondage. To keep us terrified enough to obey!

If I listen to what they say, I am a witch—you are damned—our child is evil! So why should I believe any of it, any more? Why should you?

She lets the letter drop between them.

HESTER

Come with us.

DIMMESDALE

What?

She touches him.

HESTER

We can begin again. We can take new names. We can escape.

DIMMESDALE

Please stop.

He pulls back.

HESTER

—The only sin was in the shame! And we can forget that—and be healed.

She touches him again.

DIMMESDALE

You must not—

HESTER

When we were together—there was consecration in it. Do you remember?

DIMMESDALE

— Yes.

Hester, slowly, begins to remove her clothing, her back to us. They are so, so close. He cannot help but lean in—and as he does—

On her back, are the scars from her whipping. Old, but still terrible; marking her back forever.

HESTER

Arthur. This—is God's work.

They kiss—and sink down.

— END —