

**THE SCARLET LETTER**

**REDUX**

FADE IN:

**GRAINY BLACK/WHITE PLACARD**

"This story is a portrait of the  
Puritan period in America -- a simpler  
time when rules were meant to shape  
the morals of an emerging nation."

**FADE TO BLACK.**

**FONT**

1641

**FADE IN:**

EXT. RIVER - DAY

On a bright and sunny day, beside the Massachusetts colony of Boston, a cerulean sky hangs over the sparkling blue of the Charles River -- but who can tell on BLACK & WHITE film from the 1930s.

In a shallow part of the river, a NAKED YOUNG WOMAN, HESTER PRYNNE, is standing, bathing herself. She's beautiful, a perfect body, soaping various parts of it and then scooping up and pouring water from a cup to rinse. Many apologies, but we now:

**DISSOLVE TO:**

EXT. WOODS BESIDE THE RIVER - DAY

An OLD BLIND MAN taps his way along a path by means of a stick. He is accompanied by PASTOR ARTHUR DIMMESDALE (30), handsome, kind-hearted and patient -- evident by his ability to listen to the Old Blind Man's endless blather.

OLD BLIND MAN

(a monotone)

...so I say to Mistress Crankstone,  
"Mistress Crankstone, I say, you cut  
my hair wrong. One side is shorter  
than the other," I say...

DIMMESDALE

Uh-huh...

Dimmesdale, if you haven't noticed, is dressed in the clothes  
of a colonial pastor (sort of like a Pilgrim), which makes  
sense because he's a colonial pastor.

OLD BLIND MAN

...an' Mistress Crankstone says, "If  
you're such an expert, why don't you  
cut your hair yourself..."

DIMMESDALE

Uh-huh... boy.

OLD BLIND MAN

...an' I say to Mistress Crankstone,  
"I might as well, I couldn't do any  
worse." An' Mistress Crankstone  
says...

Dimmesdale hears SPLASHING in the nearby river and looks  
through the passing foliage to see the NAKED YOUNG WOMAN  
bathing.

OLD BLIND MAN (CONT'D)

...she says she's never been so  
offended in her life, an' I say,  
"Thanks to you, my left ear is cold,"  
an' she says, "Tough." She says I'm  
lucky I still have a left ear...

As the Old Blind Man rambles, Dimmesdale can't help but stop  
to gape at this incredible vision of the bathing young woman...  
while the Old Blind Man keeps walking, not knowing that  
Dimmesdale has stopped. STAY WITH DIMMESDALE.

OLD BLIND MAN ( ) (CONT'D)

(getting more faint)

...so I grab my cane and take a swing  
at her, except she must've moved  
'cause I break a vase, an' she says...

Dimmesdale finds himself reluctantly transfixed on the Young  
Woman. He knows it's wrong wrong wrong. Then he steps down  
closer to the river, ducking beneath a thick branch to get a  
better look. He can't help it, and I doubt you could either.

DIMMESDALE  
 Mother of God...

As she finishes rinsing one of her luscious legs, she looks up and sees the pastor. She stands unabashed and waves.

HESTER  
 Pastor Dimmesdale, hi!

Dimmesdale's eyes widen as he turns to hightail out of there, running smack into the branch and going down.

HESTER (CONT'D)  
 Oh, no!

Hester quickly moves out of the water and up the riverbank to tend to him. He's out cold. She sits and cradles his bruised head in her lap.

HESTER (CONT'D)  
 You poor dear.

She strokes his hair as he slowly gains consciousness, soon realizing that he's looking up at two tremendously perfect and sizable parabolas. She sees he's conscious.

HESTER (CONT'D)  
 Goodness, that was horrible.  
 (then)  
 It's quite a lump you've got.

DIMMESDALE  
 Uh-huh, uh-huh...

She glances down his body and notices...

HESTER  
 Oh, my. There's another lump...

**PICTURE FADES OUT AND INTO:**

EXT. RIVERBANK - JUST ENOUGH TIME LATER

Hester and Dimmesdale are both lying mostly naked, after the fact, as their breathing slowly returns to normal.

Hester is smiling, quite pleased with the experience. CAMERA DRIFTS to Dimmesdale, who's horrified.

She rolls to him and puts a hand on his chest.

HESTER  
 Boy, that wasn't painful or horrifying at all.

DIMMESDALE

Hester, we have sinned!

HESTER

Right, but see I was told sex was painful and horrifying.

DIMMESDALE

We'll go to hell for this.

HESTER

It actually seemed like fun. I think I've been lied to.

DIMMESDALE

Hester, we're not married. Well, yes, YOU'RE married. To that old man.

HESTER

Oh, plah. He's been out to sea forever. And he never did anything like THIS to me.

(then)

Do you know how to roll tobacco? 'Cause I'm suddenly in the mood to try that too.

DIMMESDALE

We're in big big trouble.

HESTER

With who?

DIMMESDALE

God.

HESTER

But isn't he the one who invented this?

DIMMESDALE

Right, yes, but we're still going to hell.

HESTER

Well, I've been told hell is bad too, so maybe it'll be fun. And maybe this was meant to be. Otherwise you wouldn't have been out here walking in the woods.

DIMMESDALE

Well, I was taking Master Crumpton --  
(MORE)

DIMMESDALE (CONT'D)

(then)

Oh, no! Crumpton!

Dimmesdale quickly scrambles for his clothes.

**PICTURE FADES OUT AND INTO:**

EXT. THE EDGE OF A RAVINE - A MOMENT LATER

Dimmesdale comes running to the EDGE OF THE RAVINE and looks down.

DIMMESDALE

Master Crumpton!?

OLD BLIND MAN

(yelling)

Hey, Pastor Dimmesdale!

DIMMESDALE

Are you all right?

OLD BLIND MAN

Oh, sure, fine. But I think my foot's behind my back somewhere.

As Dimmesdale begins to climb down the side of the ravine...

**PICTURE FADES TO BLACK:**

**ON BLACK:**

**FONT**

1642 - A YEAR LATER

**FONT FADES AS:**

**BLACK SCREEN OPENS THROUGH A WIDENING CIRCLE:**

EXT. OUTSKIRTS OF COLONY - DAY

A FEW COLONISTS -- Pilgrim-like -- are coming and going. A COUPLE OF HUNTERS are carrying a DEAD DEER (that hangs from a broken branch) between them.

Pastor Dimmesdale is pushing the Old Blind Man, now in a WHEELCHAIR (its wheels are solid wood, half a foot wide, rimmed with hammered metal).

Dimmesdale looks painfully beleaguered as he pushes the Old Blind Man along the path leading out of the colony -- the Old Blind Man is now blathering on about Dimmesdale's negligence.

OLD BLIND MAN

Well, it's sure nice to get out like this. I can't do it myself anymore, not since you let me careen down that ravine.

DIMMESDALE

Yes, yes...

OLD BLIND MAN

'Course, wouldn't you know it, this darn chair is giving me a rash or a boil or something. It feels pretty splotchy. If I can get my pants down, I'll let ya have a look.

DIMMESDALE

No, that's okay. I'm not medically qualified. And, again, I'm sorry about letting you fall down the ravine.

OLD BLIND MAN

Eh, I was never that fond of walking. And now I have you to push me around.

DIMMESDALE

Yuh...

A VOICE

Hey there! Hey!

Dimmesdale looks over to the COPSE OF TREES where a RAGGEDY-LOOKING OLD MAN (with a long gray beard and a walking stick) has emerged. He is standing where there's no path. Oh, and there's a BEAR with him.

DIMMESDALE

Hello!

CHILLINGWORTH

Hello!

DIMMESDALE

Can I help you?

CHILLINGWORTH

Yes. Come here.

OLD BLIND MAN

(to Dimmesdale)

Who is it?

DIMMESDALE

A man with a long beard and a bear.  
He wants me to go over there.

OLD BLIND MAN

Why doesn't he come here?

DIMMESDALE

(yells to the guy)  
Why don't you come here?

CHILLINGWORTH

I'm tired!

DIMMESDALE

(to Old Blind Man)  
He says he's tired.

OLD BLIND MAN

You know I'm not deaf.

DIMMESDALE

(sighs)  
I'll be right back.

Dimmesdale crosses the tall grass to ROGER CHILLINGWORTH 60s) and his Bear. Chillingworth looks like he's been living in the woods for years. Which he has, so that's why he looks like it. He wears worn and torn fur clothing and a fur hat. Dimmesdale gets just close enough.

DIMMESDALE (CONT'D)

Is the bear safe?

CHILLINGWORTH

Sure, who's gonna hurt a bear?

DIMMESDALE

No, I mean, will the bear hurt me?

CHILLINGWORTH

He's as gentle as a lamb... like the one he ate this morning. But he's been around me his whole life. Near two years. Nothing to worry about with ol' Carl here.

Dimmesdale cautiously steps closer.

DIMMESDALE

What is it I can help you with?

CHILLINGWORTH

You wouldn't know where a man might find lodging in this general area?

DIMMESDALE  
Have you tried the colony? About  
twenty feet behind me?

CHILLINGWORTH  
That's a good idea.

The Old Blind Man yells out.

OLD BLIND MAN  
Hey, Dimmesdale!

DIMMESDALE  
(beleaguered)  
Yes, Master Crumpton?

OLD BLIND MAN  
Where'd you go?

DIMMESDALE  
(yells)  
I'll be right there!

But the Bear's interest has been piqued by the Old Blind Man.  
The Bear suddenly bounds in his direction.

STAY ON Dimmesdale and Chillingworth.

DIMMESDALE (CONT'D)  
What? Noooo!  
(to Chillingworth)  
Stop him!

CHILLINGWORTH  
Oh, Carl's just playing.

OLD BLIND MAN  
Ow! Hey, stop it!

DIMMESDALE  
He's got Master Crumpton's arm! And  
he's dragging him away! You've got  
to do something!

CHILLINGWORTH  
(yells)  
Carl, no! Bad boy! Carl!

They both watch. That didn't work.

CHILLINGWORTH (CONT'D)  
Well, hmmmph.

Finally Chillingworth turns to Dimmesdale.



CHILLINGWORTH (CONT'D)

Were you two close?

Dimmesdale stares incredulously at Chillingworth, then turns and runs after the Old Blind Man and the Bear.

**SLOW DISSOLVE TO:**

INT. HESTER'S HOUSE - DAY

Hester has her back to the open doorway while she cradles BABY PEARL and starts to adjust her blouse. Dimmesdale appears at the door.

DIMMESDALE

Hester, you mustn't leave the door open like this.

She turns to him, her breasts now exposed (implied by the CAMERA ANGLE).

HESTER

(brightens)

Hi, Pastor Dimmesdale! How are you?

DIMMESDALE

(seeing her breasts)

Oh. Uh...

HESTER

I left the door open because the breeze makes my nipples hard and it's easier for Pearl to suck on them.

DIMMESDALE

I... well, uh, okay...

Hester lifts Pearl and attaches her to a nipple. Dimmesdale abruptly covers his eyes.

DIMMESDALE (CONT'D)

I shouldn't be witness to your naked bosom.

HESTER

Little late for that.

DIMMESDALE

The good Lord in heaven, he will smite me.

HESTER

Just because you saw my boob?

DIMMESDALE  
God has forbidden it.

HESTER  
Then why'd he put 'em right here?

DIMMESDALE  
They are for your child's use only.

HESTER  
But that day by the river, you used  
them for all sorts of things...

DIMMESDALE  
Yes, yes, okay, I remember!

**DIMMESDALE'S POV:** Through the cracks in his fingers, he catches  
a glimpse of Hester's un-suckled breast.

DIMMESDALE (CONT'D)  
Ahhhh!

He quickly turns away.

DIMMESDALE (CONT'D)  
Hester, I'm a wicked man.

HESTER  
Oh, plah. You are not. You're a good  
kind man who got lucky.

DIMMESDALE  
No, I am wicked, cloaked in the  
garment of the mighty Lord.

He drops to his knees, still facing away from her.

DIMMESDALE (CONT'D)  
Hester, would that I'd had the  
strength that day to resist your  
welcoming nether regions.

HESTER  
Actually, they feel a little welcoming  
right now.

Impulsively he turns to her ON HIS KNEES.

DIMMESDALE  
You mustn't say such things!

Now he's face to face with the un-suckled breast.

DIMMESDALE (CONT'D)  
 (staring)  
 Good Lord...

He reluctantly turns away again, STILL ON HIS KNEES.

DIMMESDALE (CONT'D)  
 (tearfully)  
 I must stop these sinful thoughts.

HESTER  
 Are you crying?

DIMMESDALE  
 (quickly)  
 No.

HESTER  
 It sounds a little like you're crying.

DIMMESDALE  
 Well, I'm not.

HESTER  
 I think you are.

DIMMESDALE  
 Not.

HESTER  
 It doesn't make you less of a man if  
 you cry.

DIMMESDALE  
 I think my knees are bleeding.

HESTER  
 Well, stand up, silly.

DIMMESDALE  
 No, I deserve this pain.

She grabs a towel, tosses it over her shoulder to burp Pearl.  
 Dimmesdale remains TURNED AWAY ON HIS KNEES.

DIMMESDALE (CONT'D)  
 Hester, tomorrow you will go before  
 Governor Billingham and the Elders.  
 There they intend to try you.

HESTER  
 Then they are nothing but hypocrites.

DIMMESDALE  
 Hypocrites?

HESTER

After all of this, they wanna try me?

DIMMESDALE

Yes.

HESTER

Well, I'm not going to let them. I'm not the least bit attracted to any of them.

DIMMESDALE

No, no. They're not going to "try" you. They're going to put you ON trial. For adultery.

HESTER

Oh. Well, that doesn't sound good either.

DIMMESDALE

You must tell them the truth, Hester. You must tell them that I am Pearl's father. My heart cannot bear this lie.

HESTER

I won't do it! They will demand that you step down as pastor. Or worse.

DIMMESDALE

So be it.

HESTER

But without you this colony will fall into chaos.

DIMMESDALE

I think that's a bit of an exaggeration.

HESTER

People will stop going to church.

DIMMESDALE

Oh, I don't know.

HESTER

Religion will no longer have a place in Puritan society.

DIMMESDALE

You think?

HESTER  
People will stop believing in God.

DIMMESDALE  
Aw, man.

HESTER  
And without God our entire social structure will collapse. People will fall under the spell of rational logic, they'll embrace equality and fact-based science.

Pearl belches.

HESTER (CONT'D)  
Good girl.

She puts Pearl in her crib, forgetting to put her top up. Dimmesdale is still FACING AWAY ON HIS KNEES.

HESTER (CONT'D)  
As it is, I feel no shame in what we did and I intend to live a life without regret. I am going to have a happy life with my baby Pearl.

DIMMESDALE  
Oh, Hester...

Turns to her ON HIS KNEES.

DIMMESDALE (CONT'D)  
(sees her breasts)  
Waah...

Hester moves to him and embraces him, his face now shoved firmly between her billowy bosoms.

HESTER  
Oh, you poor dear. You're so tortured.

DIMMESDALE  
(whimpering)  
I must stoff these feeliffs...

HESTER  
I know, I know. It hurts me to see you like this. I want nothing more than to comfort you in your pain.

DIMMESDALE  
Uh-huhhff...

HESTER

But you're right, we mustn't partake of that comfort. Especially since you're already so pale and clammy.

DIMMESDALE

(into her breasts)  
I'm feeeling a liffle beffer...

HESTER

You're so right. We must be strong. We mustn't partake again, no matter how surprisingly joyous it was by the river.

DIMMESDALE

(into her breasts)  
Yes... be stroff, imporffant...

He pulls himself away, then stands.

HESTER

You are such a strong man, Pastor Dimmesdale. Such a good strong man. So strong, so good.

She puts her top up and hugs him again. After a moment:

HESTER (CONT'D)

Oh, my. I can feel your strength now. Boy...

DIMMESDALE

It is horrible, Hester.  
(agonizing)  
I am a man of two minds. A big one and a smaller one.

He quickly puts her at arms-length to cool himself.

DIMMESDALE (CONT'D)

So... I'll go now.

She looks down. He follows her gaze, realizes, lets her go and untucks his shirt.

DIMMESDALE (CONT'D)

In the meantime... I must find a way to make these urges go away. There must be some clever way to relieve myself when I am alone.

HESTER

I'm sure you'll figure out something. You're a smart and strong man.

There's A VIGOROUS KNOCK at the door.

SOLDIER (O.S.)  
Hester Prynne! We are here to arrest  
you, by order of the governor!

As Hester and Dimmesdale exchange concerned looks.

**DISSOLVE TO:**

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - NEXT DAY

A LARGE CROWD is gathering near one of the buildings with an overhanging balcony.

EXT. LODGING HOUSE FRONT PORCH- SAME TIME

A SHORT DISTANCE AWAY, Chillingworth steps to the front door of the LODGE where ABIGAIL CRANKSTONE is on her way out. She's a no-nonsense woman (probably in her 40s.)

ABIGAIL  
May I help you?

CHILLINGWORTH  
Might you have any available lodging  
for a weary traveler who has lost  
his bear.

ABIGAIL  
Where'd you lose your bear?

CHILLINGWORTH  
In the woods.

ABIGAIL  
Did you look for him?

CHILLINGWORTH  
I was pretty tired.

ABIGAIL  
He comes back, he's not staying  
here...

CHILLINGWORTH  
He wouldn't want to.

ABIGAIL  
What's that supposed to mean?

CHILLINGWORTH  
I mean only that he enjoys the great  
outdoors, the open sky, the stars,  
an occasional bite to eat...

There's a SHOUT from someone in the CROWD DOWN THE STREET.  
Chillingworth looks and then turns back to Abigail.

CHILLINGWORTH (CONT'D)  
You wouldn't know why the townsfolk  
have gathered, would you?

ABIGAIL  
Of course I do. I know everything  
that goes on around here.

A beat.

CHILLINGWORTH  
So then perhaps you might TELL me  
why the townsfolk have gathered.

ABIGAIL  
There has been a grave and horrifying  
development in Pastor Dimmesdale's  
church. Governor Billingham is to  
address the crowd. It is a scandal  
of great and repulsive proportions.

CHILLINGWORTH  
And can you tell me what this scandal  
is about?

ABIGAIL  
Of course I can.

A beat.

CHILLINGWORTH  
Okay, WHAT is this scandal about?

ABIGAIL  
A young woman has given of herself  
to someone other than her husband.

CHILLINGWORTH  
Ah, that is most detestable. Could  
you tell me, does her husband accuse  
her of this disgusting act?

ABIGAIL  
Of course I could tell you.

A beat.

CHILLINGWORTH  
(sharp)  
DOES... her husband accuse her of  
this disgusting act?



ABIGAIL

No, she's a widow. Her husband disappeared some time ago.

CHILLINGWORTH

Might you tell me...  
 (stops himself, then)  
 TELL me... about her husband.

ABIGAIL

He was a doctor who disappeared at sea. No one has heard from him in two years. It is presumed that his mangled body is rotting at the bottom of the sea.

CHILLINGWORTH

That is tragic.

ABIGAIL

Yes... and in the absence of her husband, the trollop saw fit to share herself in a willy-nilly fashion.

CHILLINGWORTH

That is indeed shameful.

ABIGAIL

Yes. Hester Prynne is most shameful.

CHILLINGWORTH

(gasps)  
 Hester Prynne? But, Hester Prynne is as virginous and pure as a potato.

ABIGAIL

Oh? Do you know the tart?

CHILLINGWORTH

Know her? I was her hus...  
 (then)  
 ...band's buddy.

ABIGAIL

And you are?

CHILLINGWORTH

Roger Chillingworth.

ABIGAIL

Chillingworth.

CHILLINGWORTH

Yes, and I only hope, for the sake of my dead friend's soul, that you are mistaken in this, since surely there can be no proof of Hester Prynne's guilt in this heinous act?

ABIGAIL

She has a child.

CHILLINGWORTH

Except for that.

(then)

Well then... I thank God Master Prynne did not live to learn this news. He would have no choice but to seek revenge against the loathsome scoundrel who did this to her. Brutal revenge.

(seething)

Vengeful revenge.

**DISSOLVE TO:**

EXT. TOWN SQUARE - SAME TIME

This is down the street, where the TOWNSFOLK have gathered.

**ANGLE ON:** TOWN GOSSIPS

GOSSIP #1

I heard the only reason ships stop in Boston harbor is because of her.

GOSSIP #2

I heard she has a collection of pestles... but no mortars.

GOSSIP #3

I heard she can fire a musket ball across a field.

GOSSIP #1

Who would let a woman shoot a gun?

GOSSIP #3

Gun?

The other women pause to think that over.

As they do, GOVERNOR BILLINGHAM (old) and several other TOWN ELDERS have appeared on the Town Hall's BALCONY above the crowd. Billingham puts his hands up to quiet them.

BILLINGHAM

Good people of our blessed  
Massachusetts Colony! We have gathered  
here today to pass fair and unbiased  
judgement on the whore Hester Prynne.

CROWD

Bring her out. / Let's have at her.  
/ We want to see the strumpet!

Billingham nods at the GUARDS who motion for some other GUARDS to bring Hester (holding BABY PEARL) out of the SMALL JAIL opposite the Town Hall. The crowd starts YELLING insults at her: Disgraceful! / Shameful! / Revolting!

BILLINGHAM

People, people! Knock it off!

The crowd QUIETS. Then:

BILLINGHAM (CONT'D)

Now, Hester Prynne! You have been  
accused of taking part in lewd,  
vulgar, disgusting conduct reserved  
only for holy matrimony.

The crowd ERUPTS AGAIN. Billingham raises his arms to calm them. Then to Hester:

BILLINGHAM (CONT'D)

Of this, you can hardly deny!

HESTER

Right. You mean the baby.

BELLINGHAM

Since you so readily admit your guilt  
in this matter, it is our duty to  
determine an appropriate punishment.

(to all)

Anybody?

COLONIST

What about ants?

BELLINGHAM

What about 'em?

COLONIST

We bury her up to her neck and get a  
thousand ants to eat her head.

THE CROWD voices their approval.

BELLINGHAM

Okay, first, where do we get the ants?

COLONIST

They're around.

BELLINGHAM

Right, and then you're gonna count out a thousand?

COLONIST

Not me, but someone.

BELLINGHAM

Next?

**ANGLE ON: DIMMESDALE AND THE OLD BLIND MAN**

They are only just arriving at the gathering, to make their way through the crowd. It should be noted that the Old Blind Man is NOW MISSING AN ARM.

DIMMESDALE

Excuse me, ladies.

They turn and see Dimmesdale.

GOSSIP #1

Oh, Pastor Dimmesdale. Of course.

They part so that the Pastor can push the Old Blind Man through.

OLD BLIND MAN

(to Dimmesdale)

I knew it -- we're late. Where were you when it was time to leave?

DIMMESDALE

I had official church business.

OLD BLIND MAN

Right. In that little shed out back?

DIMMESDALE

I needed to pray for poor Hester Prynne.

OLD BLIND MAN

Well, that explains shouting her name.

Pushing him between more TOWNSPEOPLE.