*#1 The Scarlet Letter* Book Description

America’s first psychological novel, **Nathaniel Hawthorne’s** *The Scarlet Letter* is a dark tale of love, crime, and revenge set in colonial New England. It revolves around a single, forbidden act of passion that forever alters the lives of three members of a small Puritan community: Hester Prynne, an ardent and fierce woman who bears the punishment of her sin in humble silence; the Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale, a respected public figure who is inwardly tormented by long-hidden guilt; and the malevolent Roger Chillingworth, Hester’s husband—a man who seethes with an Ahab-like lust for vengeance. The landscape of this classic novel is uniquely American, but the themes it explores are universal—the nature of sin, guilt, and penitence, the clash between our private and public selves, and the spiritual and psychological cost of living outside society. Constructed with the elegance of a Greek tragedy, *The Scarlet Letter* brilliantly illuminates the truth that lies deep within the human heart.

*#2 The Scarlet Letter* Super Simple Synopsis

*The Scarlet Letter* is set in the 17th-century Puritan era of Boston. Hester Prynne and Arthur Dimmesdale have an adulterous relationship and a child is conceived. Refusing to reveal the identity of the baby’s father, Hester Prynne is sentenced to wear a scarlet letter A on her clothing as a public “badge of shame” to symbolize her participation in the act of adultery. Hester’s estranged husband secretly returns and assists the ailing minister who is wasting away from the psychological effects of shame. The husband, Roger Chillingworth, begins to sense a connection between Arthur Dimmesdale and Hester Prynne. Chillingworth secretly tortures Dimmesdale while providing him medical care, while Prynne only requests that the minister acknowledges her and their child in public. Hester and Arthur plan to run away to Europe together, but during his pre-departure sermon, he collapses and dies after revealing his sin. Hester and Pearl leave Boston, Chillingworth dies a year later, and Hester is buried with an A on a shared tombstone with Dimmesdale upon her later return and death.

*#3 The Scarlet Letter* Simple Synopsis

The story begins in seventeenth-century Boston, then a Puritan settlement. A young woman, Hester Prynne, is led from the town prison with her infant daughter, Pearl, in her arms and the scarlet letter “A” on her breast. A man in the crowd tells an elderly onlooker that Hester is being punished for adultery. Hester’s husband, a scholar much older than she is, sent her ahead to America, but he never arrived in Boston. The consensus is that he has been lost at sea. While waiting for her husband, Hester has apparently had an affair, as she has given birth to a child. She will not reveal her lover’s identity, however, and the scarlet letter, along with her public shaming, is her punishment for her sin and her secrecy. On this day Hester is led to the town scaffold and harangued by the town fathers, but she again refuses to identify her child’s father.

The elderly onlooker is Hester’s missing husband, who is now practicing medicine and calling himself Roger Chillingworth. He settles in Boston, intent on revenge. He reveals his true identity to no one but Hester, whom he has sworn to secrecy. Several years pass. Hester supports herself by working as a seamstress, and Pearl grows into a willful, impish child. Shunned by the community, they live in a small cottage on the outskirts of Boston. Community officials attempt to take Pearl away from Hester, but, with the help of Arthur Dimmesdale, a young and eloquent minister, the mother and daughter manage to stay together. Dimmesdale, however, appears to be wasting away and suffers from mysterious heart trouble, seemingly caused by psychological distress. Chillingworth attaches himself to the ailing minister and eventually moves in with him so that he can provide his patient with round-the-clock care. Chillingworth also suspects that there may be a connection between the minister’s torments and Hester’s secret, and he begins to test Dimmesdale to see what he can learn. One afternoon, while the minister sleeps, Chillingworth discovers a mark on the man’s breast (the details of which are kept from the reader), which convinces him that his suspicions are correct.

Dimmesdale’s psychological anguish deepens, and he invents new tortures for himself. In the meantime, Hester’s charitable deeds and quiet humility have earned her a reprieve from the scorn of the community. One night, when Pearl is about seven years old, she and her mother are returning home from a visit to a deathbed when they encounter Dimmesdale atop the town scaffold, trying to punish himself for his sins. Hester and Pearl join him, and the three link hands. Dimmesdale refuses Pearl’s request that he acknowledge her publicly the next day, and a meteor marks a dull red “A” in the night sky. Hester can see that the minister’s condition is worsening, and she resolves to intervene. She goes to Chillingworth and asks him to stop adding to Dimmesdale’s self-torment. Chillingworth refuses.

Hester arranges an encounter with Dimmesdale in the forest because she is aware that Chillingworth has probably guessed that she plans to reveal his identity to Dimmesdale. The former lovers decide to flee to Europe, where they can live with Pearl as a family. They will take a ship sailing from Boston in four days. Both feel a sense of release, and Hester removes her scarlet letter and lets down her hair. Pearl, playing nearby, does not recognize her mother without the letter. The day before the ship is to sail, the townspeople gather for a holiday and Dimmesdale preaches his most eloquent sermon ever. Meanwhile, Hester has learned that Chillingworth knows of their plan and has booked passage on the same ship. Dimmesdale, leaving the church after his sermon, sees Hester and Pearl standing before the town scaffold. He impulsively mounts the scaffold with his lover and his daughter, and confesses publicly, exposing a scarlet letter seared into the flesh of his chest. He falls dead, as Pearl kisses him.

Frustrated in his revenge, Chillingworth dies a year later. Hester and Pearl leave Boston, and no one knows what has happened to them. Many years later, Hester returns alone, still wearing the scarlet letter, to live in her old cottage and resume her charitable work. She receives occasional letters from Pearl, who has married a European aristocrat and established a family of her own. When Hester dies, she is buried next to Dimmesdale. The two share a single tombstone, which bears a scarlet “A.”

*#4 The Scarlet Letter* Detailed Assigned Chapters Synopsis

**Chapter 1- The Prison Door**

One of the first buildings constructed by the settlers of Boston was the prison. Despite being cleared of all brush, a wild rosebush grows at the threshold of the prison door. It is thought the rosebush symbolizes morality and can relieve human frailty and sorrow.

**Chapter 2- The Market Place**

One summer morning 200 years ago, every person in town is paying close attention to the prison door because a local woman is being held within the prison. The women are particularly interested in the fate of Hester Prynne. The prison door opens and Hester is led out. She is holding an infant. A red letter “A” has been sewn on her gown. She is then escorted to a scaffold where she must stand on a platform as a part of her punishment. Everyone in the town watches her, including her father. Hester is ashamed as she looks out at the sea of faces.

**Chapter 3- The Recognition**

From the platform, Hester sees a Native American and another man enter the market place. The man asks who Hester is and what she has done. The man learns Hester committed adultery and will not name the father of her baby. She is being punished in the hopes she will reveal the name of her lover. Both Reverend Dimmesdale and Reverend Wilson try to get the information from Hester, but she refuses.

**Chapter 6- Pearl**

Hester decides to name her daughter Pearl because she paid a great price for her treasured daughter. She initially feared Pearl would be plagued by unhappiness because of Hester’s experiences while carrying her. Pearl is a happy and playful child, but she sometimes has fits of emotion. Hester is confused by these episodes. Pearl is also shunned by the local children because of Hester’s reputation. She often experiences fits of rage when around other children. Her only real playmate is Hester, so she creates imaginary playmates. Despite being completely innocent, Pearl is punished in the same severe manner as her mother.

**Chapter 8- The Elf-Child and the Minister**

The Governor is accompanied by Mr. Wilson, Roger Chillingworth, and Reverend Dimmesdale. They tell Hester they are concerned that she is not a proper role model for her daughter. They believe Pearl may be better off being raised by another family. Mr. Wilson asks Pearl who made her, and Pearl replies she had been plucked from the rose bush that grows by the prison door. The men are horrified. Hester begs to keep her child and asks her former minister, Dimmesdale, to help. He convinces the other men to allow Hester to keep Pearl, but Dimmesdale will teach catechism to Pearl.

**Chapter 13- Another View of Hester**

Over the years, Hester becomes more accepted by the community. She also becomes a sought after seamstress by the privileged in the community and is known for her generosity to the poor. In fact, many in the community now say the scarlet “A” now means able. Because of her isolation, Hester is free to her own thoughts. This causes her to sometimes doubt her decision to raise Pearl rather than send her to heaven. She also contemplates suicide sometimes. She recognizes that Dimmesdale is tortured by his guilt. She decides to meet with Chillingworth to talk to him about ending his revenge scheme.

**Chapter 16- A Forest Walk**

Hester walks with Pearl in the woods with the intention of revealing Chillingworth’s identity to Dimmesdale. She knows that he often walks by himself in the woods, and plans to meet him when he is by himself. Though Pearl is bathed in sunlight, it leaves as soon as Hester approaches. Pearl asks Hester if she has ever met the evil spirit in the woods. Hester tells her she has, and the evil spirit gave her the scarlet letter. Hester meets Dimmesdale in the woods.

**Chapter 23- The Revelation of the Scarlet Letter**

Dimmesdale ends his speech and the procession heads to the market place. The procession is interrupted by a horrifying shout. All eyes are on Dimmesdale, who appears to be ill. He asks Hester and Pearl to stand with him on the scaffold. Chillingworth tries to stop Dimmesdale, but he holds hands with Hester and Pearl on the scaffold. Dimmesdale reveals he is Pearl’s father and Hester’s secret lover. He then collapses and dies in Hester’s arms.

*#5 The Scarlet Letter* Detailed Chapters Synopsis

**Chapter 1- The Prison Door -** One of the first buildings constructed by the settlers of Boston was the prison. Despite being cleared of all brush, a wild rosebush grows at the threshold of the prison door. It is thought the rosebush symbolizes morality and can relieve human frailty and sorrow.

**Chapter 2- The Market Place -** One summer morning 200 years ago, every person in town is paying close attention to the prison door because a local woman is being held within the prison. The women are particularly interested in the fate of Hester Prynne. The prison door opens and Hester is led out. She is holding an infant. A red letter “A” has been sewn on her gown. She is then escorted to a scaffold where she must stand on a platform as a part of her punishment. Everyone in the town watches her, including her father. Hester is ashamed as she looks out at the sea of faces.

**Chapter 3- The Recognition -** From the platform, Hester sees a Native American and another man enter the market place. The man asks who Hester is and what she has done. The man learns Hester committed adultery and will not name the father of her baby. She is being punished in the hopes she will reveal the name of her lover. Both Reverend Dimmesdale and Reverend Wilson try to get the information from Hester, but she refuses.

**Chapter 4- The Interview -** After being returned to the prison, Hester is being watched by the guards so that she does not harm herself or her child. Hester becomes emotional and upset, alarming the guards further. Another man, Roger Chillingworth, offers to calm Hester. He is given time alone with Hester because he claims to be a physician. He gives Hester and the baby calming draughts. It is revealed that Roger is Hester’s husband. He is not angry; he pities her. He knew she never loved him, but he married her anyway. Roger says they have both been wronged and asks the name of the man who is responsible. He says he will get revenge for both of them. Hester refuses to name her lover. Roger makes her promise never to reveal his identity to anyone in town.

**Chapter 5- Hester at Her Needle -** Hester is released from prison but must still wear the scarlet letter until she reveals her lover’s identity. Her burden and shame grows every day because she is singled out as a sinner in the Puritan community. However, she is free to return to Europe, but she chooses to remain in the community. Hester and her daughter move into a thatched cottage on the outskirts of town. Hester is without friends, but her needlework is in demand for christening gowns, and fancy dresses. Hester dresses very plainly, but dresses her daughter in the finest clothes. Hester is not welcomed at the church and is tormented by the local children. She is isolated from everyone in the community and is not welcome to attend church services.

**Chapter 6- Pearl -** Hester decides to name her daughter Pearl because she paid a great price for her treasured daughter. She initially feared Pearl would be plagued by unhappiness because of Hester’s experiences while carrying her. Pearl is a happy and playful child, but she sometimes has fits of emotion. Hester is confused by these episodes. Pearl is also shunned by the local children because of Hester’s reputation. She often experiences fits of rage when around other children. Her only real playmate is Hester, so she creates imaginary playmates. Despite being completely innocent, Pearl is punished in the same severe manner as her mother.

**Chapter 7- The Governor’s Hall -** Hester delivers a pair of embroidered gloves to Governor Bellingham’s mansion for his wife. She brings Pearl with her because she has heard that the elders may want to take Pearl away from her. She wants them to see that Pearl is a happy and healthy child. Children try to throw mud at them as they walk into town, but Pearl’s temper scares them away Pearl is fascinated by the splendor of the mansion. She begins to cry because she wants a red rose, and Hester tries to calm her. Hester does not want the Governor to think Pearl is possessed by evil spirits. Pearl starts screaming, but stops once she sees the Governor.

**Chapter 8- The Elf-Child and the Minister -** The Governor is accompanied by Mr. Wilson, Roger Chillingworth, and Reverend Dimmesdale. They tell Hester they are concerned that she is not a proper role model for her daughter. They believe Pearl may be better off being raised by another family. Mr. Wilson asks Pearl who made her, and Pearl replies she had been plucked from the rose bush that grows by the prison door. The men are horrified. Hester begs to keep her child and asks her former minister, Dimmesdale, to help. He convinces the other men to allow Hester to keep Pearl, but Dimmesdale will teach catechism to Pearl.

**Chapter 9- The Leech -** Hester’s husband, now using the identity of Roger Chillingworth, becomes a prominent physician in the community. He also becomes active in religious life. Dimmesdale’s health begins to fail, and Chillingworth offers to treat him. He becomes close to Dimmesdale and the two men move in together. Chillingworth conducts experiments in his laboratory, which concerns the community. Some believe he is involved in the black arts. People begin to believe Dimmesdale is either haunted by Satan or is under the influence of Satan’s emissary, Chillingworth.

**Chapter 10- The Leech and His Patient -** Chillingworth continues to investigate Dimmesdale, but he is unaware of Chillingworth’s agenda. He trusts Chillingworth is his friend. Dimmesdale alludes to a personal secret, but does not reveal his secret, despite Chillingworth’s prompting. Their conversation is interrupted by the arrival of Hester and Pearl. After the Prynnes walk away, the men discuss Hester and the belief evil can manifest itself as a sickness. Chillingworth decides to pursue this conversation in the future.

**Chapter 11- The Interior of a Heart -** The relationship between Chillingworth and Dimmesdale changes after their last conversation. Chillingworth now knows how to focus his revenge. Dimmesdale senses something evil is watching over him, but he does not suspect it is his trusted confidante. Dimmesdale is tortured by his secret and the image of Pearl pointing at Hester’s scarlet letter, and then pointing at him.

**Chapter 12- The Minister’s Vigil -** Dimmesdale walks to the scaffold where Hester once stood. He shrieks, but no one takes notice. Hester and Pearl encounter Dimmesdale, and he asks them to stand on the platform with him. Pearl asks him to stand with them on the platform tomorrow at noon. He says he will stand with them on Judgment Day. Dimmesdale sees a streak of light in the sky shaped like the letter “A”. Chillingworth is watching and offers to walk Dimmesdale home.

**Chapter 13- Another View of Hester -** Over the years, Hester becomes more accepted by the community. She also becomes a sought after seamstress by the privileged in the community and is known for her generosity to the poor. In fact, many in the community now say the scarlet “A” now means able. Because of her isolation, Hester is free to her own thoughts. This causes her to sometimes doubt her decision to raise Pearl rather than send her to heaven. She also contemplates suicide sometimes. She recognizes that Dimmesdale is tortured by his guilt. She decides to meet with Chillingworth to talk to him about ending his revenge scheme.

**Chapter 14- Hester and the Physician -** Hester approaches Chillingworth to talk about Dimmesdale. She notices his appearance has changed; he now has a sinister appearance. She accuses him of causing Dimmesdale to suffer a daily living death. Hester tells him she must reveal his identity before he destroys Dimmesdale. She begs him to forgive both of them and says his hatred has turned him into a fiend. Chillingworth refuses to stop seeking revenge.

**Chapter 15- Hester and Pearl -** Hester declares her hatred for Chillingworth and regrets marrying him. Pearl fashions an “A” out of seaweed while playing and shows it to her mother. Hester is disturbed by this, but realizes that Pearl is not trying to hurt her. She asks Hester why she wears the scarlet letter and why the minister keeps his hand over his heart. Hester evades the questions, but Pearl brings them back up the next day. Hester threatens to punish her.

**Chapter 16- A Forest Walk -** Hester walks with Pearl in the woods with the intention of revealing Chillingworth’s identity to Dimmesdale. She knows that he often walks by himself in the woods, and plans to meet him when he is by himself. Though Pearl is bathed in sunlight, it leaves as soon as Hester approaches. Pearl asks Hester if she has ever met the evil spirit in the woods. Hester tells her she has, and the evil spirit gave her the scarlet letter. Hester meets Dimmesdale in the woods.

**Chapter 17- The Pastor and His Parishioner -** Dimmesdale tells Hester she is lucky she can openly address her sin by wearing the scarlet letter. He is being tortured by his sin. Hester tells Dimmesdale that Chillingworth is his enemy and her former husband. He forgives Hester for keeping the secret for 7 years. Hester advises Dimmesdale to return to Europe, but he refuses to leave. He is afraid to be alone, but Hester says she will go with him.

**Chapter 18- A Flood of Sunshine -** Hester removes the scarlet letter, throws it into the woods, and feels all her burdens melt away. She and Dimmesdale decide to start a new life together someplace new. They will raise Pearl together.

**Chapter 19- The Child at the Brookside -** Dimmesdale worries that Pearl will not respond to him, but Hester tells him Pearl will grow to love him. Pearl approaches Hester and Dimmesdale, but she refuses to cross the brook to join them. She points to where Hester used to wear the scarlet letter. Hester tells Pearl to pick up the scarlet letter and bring it to her. Pearl tells Hester to pick it up and feels a sense of doom once she picks up the letter. Pearl then crosses the brook. Dimmesdale kisses Pearl on the forehead, and she immediately washes her face in the brook.

**Chapter 20- The Minister in the Maze -** Dimmesdale leaves first so that no one will see him with Hester and Pearl. Before he leaves, they devise a plan to leave for Europe in 3 days with Hester and Pearl on a ship. As he returns to town, Dimmesdale is welcomed home by Chillingworth. He tells Chillingworth he will no longer require his medical services. He also tells Chillingworth he is now free to live on his own, and he does not need to live with him anymore.

**Chapter 21- The New England Holiday -** Hester and Pearl join the rest of the town for Election Day festivities. Pearl asks if Dimmesdale will talk to them like he did the other day at the brook. Hester tells her he will not be able to speak with them today, and she should not try to get his attention. Hester sees Chillingworth talking with the commander of the ship they plan to sail on back to Europe. Hester begins to worry that Chillingworth will stand in the way of their pending happiness.

**Chapter 22- The Procession -** The procession begins. After the officials file into the square, Dimmesdale delivers what is to be his final sermon before he leaves with Hester and Pearl. Hester watches Dimmesdale intently, but Pearl is more interested with the people in the crowd. Pearl delivers a message from the ship’s commander to her mother. He says he spoke to Chillingworth, who told him that he plans to personally escort Dimmesdale to the ship. Hester worries that they may never escape.

**Chapter 23- The Revelation of the Scarlet Letter -** Dimmesdale ends his speech and the procession heads to the market place. The procession is interrupted by a horrifying shout. All eyes are on Dimmesdale, who appears to be ill. He asks Hester and Pearl to stand with him on the scaffold. Chillingworth tries to stop Dimmesdale, but he holds hands with Hester and Pearl on the scaffold. Revealing a mark on his chest, Dimmesdale reveals he is Pearl’s father and Hester’s secret lover. He then collapses and dies in Hester’s arms.

**Chapter 24- Conclusion -** Several days later, some spectators claim they saw a scarlet letter on Dimmesdale’s chest. Chillingworth turns into a shriveled, unhappy shell of a man after he cannot focus his energy on revenge. He dies that year and leaves a substantial estate solely to Pearl. Pearl is now the richest heiress in the New World. She and Hester disappear. Years later, Hester Prynne returns to Boston without Pearl, who appears to be living in England. Hester becomes a trusted woman in the community until she dies after living a long life. She is buried near and shares a gravestone with Arthur Dimmesdale.