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- Nathaniel Hawthorne (美) 著
- John Escott (英) 改写

The Scarlet Letter

红字



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内容简介

胸前佩戴着红字的这个女人是个没有任何朋友的罪人。人们对她指指点点，那些受人尊重的人都唾弃她，牧师们用尖锐的言辞抨击她。耻辱不分日夜地追随着她。

故事发生在 17 世纪的新英格兰。当时，清教徒们飘洋过海来到美洲，建立了新的城镇，同时也带来了自己国家的宗教和习俗。在早期马萨诸塞州的波士顿，教会的势力非常强大——非常冷酷无情。任何违背教会和上帝训诫的人都会受到惩罚。

但是对于赫斯特·普林，这个生下私生子的女人来说，她并不是唯一的罪人。那谁是孩子的父亲呢？他为什么不大胆地公开自己的身份？为什么赫斯特要承受胸佩红字的耻辱，而她的情人却可以逃脱惩罚？他不是也同样有罪吗？

THE SCARLET LETTER

The woman who wears the scarlet letter on her bosom is a woman without friends, a woman who has sinned. Fingers point at her, respectable people turn their faces away from her, the priests speak hard words about her. Shame follows in her footsteps, night and day.

Because this is New England in the 1600s. The Puritans have crossed the sea to the shores of America, building their new towns, bringing their religion and their customs with them from the old country. And in the early years of Boston, in the state of Massachusetts, the church is strong—and unforgiving. Anyone who breaks the laws of the church, and of God, must be punished.

But Hester Prynne, whose husband is not her baby's father, did not sin alone. Who is the father of her child? Why does he not speak out? Why should Hester wear the scarlet letter of shame, and not her lover? Is he not guilty too?

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The Scarlet Letter

红 字



Salem, my home town, is a quiet place, and not many ships call at the port here, though in the last century, before the war with Britain, the port was often busy. Now the ships go down the coast to the great seaports of Boston or New York, and grass grows in the streets around the old port buildings in Salem.

For a few years, when I was a young man, I worked in the port offices of Salem. Most of the time, there was very little work to do, and one day in 1849 I was looking through an old wooden box in one of the dusty, unused rooms of the building. It was full of papers about long-forgotten ships, but then something red caught my eye. I took it out and saw that it was a piece of red material, in the shape of a letter about ten centimetres long. It was the capital letter A. It was a wonderful piece of needlework, with patterns of gold thread around the letter, but the material was now worn thin with age.

塞勒姆，我的家乡，是一个平静的地方，没有太多的船只在这里的港口停靠，但在上个世纪我们和英国开战之前，这个港口还挺繁忙的。如今，船只都沿着海岸南下，驶向波士顿或纽约的大港口了。塞勒姆旧港口建筑物周围的街道上蔓生着野草。

我年轻时，曾在塞勒姆的港口办事处工作过几年。大多数时候，我都很清闲，但是在 1849 年的一天，我在一间布满灰尘、已经废弃不用的房间里查看一个旧木匣子。匣子中塞满了早已被人遗忘的船只的有关文件，有一件红色的东西引起了我的注意。我把它拿出来才发现原来是一片红色的布料，看起来像是一个字母，约有 10 厘米长，那是个大写的“A”。这是一件精细的针线活儿，金线滚边，不过由于年代久远，布料已被磨得很薄了。

needlework *n.* the things
made by sewing 刺绣

It was a strange thing to find. What could it mean? Was it once part of some fashionable lady's dress long years ago? Perhaps a mark to show that the wearer was a famous person, or someone of good family or great importance?

I held it in my hands, wondering, and it seemed to me that the scarlet letter had some deep meaning, which I could not understand. Then I held the letter to my chest and — you must not doubt my words — experienced a strange feeling of burning heat. Suddenly the letter seemed to be not red material, but red-hot metal. I trembled, and let the letter fall upon the floor.

Then I saw that there was an old packet of papers next to its place in the box. I opened the packet carefully and began to read. There were several papers, explaining the history of the scarlet letter, and containing many details of the life and experiences of a woman called Hester Prynne. She had died long ago, sometime in the 1690s, but many people in the state of Massachusetts at that time had known her name and story.

And it is Hester Prynne's story that I tell you now. It is a story of the early years of Boston, soon after the City Fathers had built with their own hands the first wooden buildings — the houses, the churches . . . and the prison.

这真是一件很奇怪的东西。它代表什么？它是多年前某位时髦女士衣衫上的一个装饰吗？或许这是一个标志，表明佩戴者声名显赫，或是有良好的家室背景，抑或地位不凡？

我把它捧在手里猜想着，这个猩红的字母似乎有某种深刻的意义，是我不能理解的。我把这个字母贴在胸前——你一定要相信我所说的——我感觉到一种奇特的灼热。突然间，这个字母似乎不再是一片红布，而是变成了一块烧红的金属。我颤抖起来，红字滑落到了地板上。

接着我看到匣子里还有一捆很旧的文件，就放在紧挨着那个红字的地方。我小心地打开了这捆文件读起来。其中的几张纸介绍了红字的历史，包括了一个名叫赫斯特·普林的女人的生平和经历的很多细节。她早已去世，大约是17世纪90年代的事了，但是在当时的马萨诸塞州，有很多人都听到过她和她的故事。

现在我要讲给你们听的就是赫斯特·普林的故事。这个故事发生在波士顿建城之初，在先辈们用双手建成了第一批木质建筑之后，这些建筑有房屋、教堂……还有监狱。

scarlet adj. bright red 猩红色的；鲜红色的

1

Hester Prynne's shame

On that June morning, in the middle years of the seventeenth century, the prison in Boston was still a new building: But it already looked old, and was a dark, ugly place, surrounded by rough grass. The only thing of beauty was a wild rose growing by the door, and its bright, sweet-smelling flowers seemed to smile kindly at the poor prisoners who went into that place, and at those who came out to their death.

A crowd of people waited in Prison Lane. The men all had beards, and wore sad-coloured clothes and tall grey hats. There were women, too, in the crowd, and all eyes watched the heavy wooden door of the prison. There was no mercy in the faces, and the women seemed to take a special interest in what was going to happen. They were country women, and the bright morning sun shone down on strong shoulders and wide skirts, and on round, red faces. Many of them had been born in England, and had crossed the sea twenty years before, with the first families who came to build the town of Boston in New England. They brought the customs and religion of old England with them—and also the loud voices and strong opinions of Englishwomen of those times.

1. 赫斯特·普林的耻辱

这是 17 世纪中期一个 6 月的早上，当时波士顿的监狱刚刚建成不久，但是看上去已经很旧了。这是一个阴暗、丑陋的地方，四周杂草丛生。唯一美丽的是门旁的一株野玫瑰，它那鲜艳的花朵散发出甜美气息，好像在向那些入狱的犯人或出监狱死的可怜囚徒善意地微笑着。

一大群人等候在监狱外的小道上。男人们都留着胡须，穿着灰暗的衣服，戴着灰色的高顶帽。人群中也有妇女，所有人的视线都集中在监狱那扇沉重的木门上。人们的脸上没有一丝同情，女人们似乎对即将发生的事更有兴致。她们都是些乡下女人，早上明媚的阳光照着她们强壮的肩膀、宽松的裙子和饱满、红润的脸。她们当中的很多人都出生在英格兰，在 20 年前和最先来到这里的家庭一起横渡大海，在新英格兰这片土地上共同创建了波士顿城。她们带来了英格兰本土的风俗和宗教——也带来了那个时代英格兰妇女特有的响亮嗓门和强烈偏见。

*mercy n. kindness, pity,
and a willingness to
forgive 仁慈；宽容；怜悯*

‘It would be better,’ said one hard-faced woman of fifty, ‘if we good, sensible, church-going women could judge this Hester Prynne. And would we give her the same light punishment that the magistrates give her? No!’

‘People say,’ said another woman, ‘that Mr Dimmesdale, her priest, is deeply saddened by the shame that this woman has brought on his church.’

‘The magistrates are too merciful,’ said a third woman. ‘They should burn the letter into her forehead with hot metal, not put it on the front of her dress!’

‘She ought to die!’ cried another woman. ‘She has brought shame on all of us! Ah — here she comes!’

The door of the prison opened and, like a black shadow coming out into sunshine, the prison officer appeared. He put his right hand on the shoulder of a woman and pulled her forward, but she pushed him away and stepped out into the open air. There was a child in her arms — a baby of three months — which shut its eyes and turned its head away from the bright sun.

The woman’s face was suddenly pink under the stares of the crowd, but she smiled proudly and looked round at her neighbours and the people of her town. On the bosom of her dress, in fine red cloth and surrounded with fantastic patterns of gold thread, was the letter A.

The young woman was tall and perfectly shaped. She had long dark hair which shone in the sunlight, and a

一个五十多岁、一脸刻薄相的女人说：“如果能让我们这些正直、理智、行事符合教规的女性来审判赫斯特·普林就更好了。我们会像治安官那样给她那么轻的判决吗？不会！”

“大家都说，”另一个女人说，“丁梅斯代尔先生，就是她的牧师，因为这个女人给他的教众带来的耻辱，简直伤心透啦。”

“那帮治安官真是太宽大了，”第三个女人说道，“他们应该用烧红的烙铁把那个字母烙在她脑门上，而不是让她戴在胸口。”

“她应该去死！”另一个女人叫嚷着，“她把我们大家的脸都丢尽了！啊——她来了！”

牢门打开了，监狱长像一道出现在日光下的黑影似的走了出来。他右手抓着一个女人的肩头，拽着她向前走，但是她推开了他，自己走了出来。她怀里抱着个孩子——一个三个月大的婴儿。那孩子闭上眼睛，转过头去，好避开那耀眼的阳光。

在众目睽睽之下，那个女人脸上突然泛起红晕，但她却露出高傲的微笑，用目光环视着街坊邻里和同镇居民。她的衣服的前胸上露出了一个用红色细布做成、周边用金线绣成精巧花边的字母“A”。

那年轻妇女身材高挑，体态优美，乌黑的长发在阳光下熠熠生辉。她面容姣好，



magistrate n. someone who judges less serious crimes in a court of law 地方法官；治安法官

beautiful face with deep black eyes. She walked like a lady, and those who had expected her to appear sad and ashamed were surprised how her beauty shone out through her misfortune.

But the thing that everyone stared at was the Scarlet Letter, sewn so fantastically on to her dress.

‘She is clever with her needle,’ said one of the women. ‘But what a way to show it! She is meant to wear that letter as a punishment, not as something to be proud of!’

The officer stepped forward and people moved back to allow the woman to walk through the crowd. It was not far from the prison to the market-place, where, at the western end, in front of Boston’s earliest church, stood the scaffold. Here, criminals met their death before the eyes of the townspeople, but the scaffold platform was also used as a place of shame, where those who had done wrong in the eyes of God were made to stand and show their shameful faces to the world.

Hester Prynne accepted her punishment bravely. She walked up the wooden steps to the platform, and turned to face the stares of the crowd.

A thousand eyes fixed on her, looking at the scarlet letter on her bosom. People today might laugh at a sight like this, but in those early years of New England, religious feeling was very strong, and the shame of Hester Prynne’s sin was felt deeply by young and old throughout the town.