



The Scarlet Letter

Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804 - 1864)

Read by:	Cori Samuel	Format:	MP3 CD in DVD case
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The Scarlet Letter by Nathaniel Hawthorne is considered his finest novel. Set in Puritan Boston from 1642 – 1649, the story examines the psychological turmoil resulting from the sin of adultery committed by Hester Prynne and a lover that she refuses to name. Hester is publicly shamed and forced to wear a scarlet letter “A” on her dress to symbolize her adultery. The father, Reverend Dimmesdale, is consumed with guilt, reflected in his failing health and increasingly fiery sermons. Her husband, Roger Chillingworth, insists she keep their relationship secret and seeks revenge on Dimmesdale. The pressures of secrecy, guilt, and revenge intensify until Hester forces a resolution, which leads to a dramatic conclusion. In a final irony, although her crime has been largely forgotten over time, she continues to wear the letter, while Dimmesdale’s dying confession is overlooked in favor of the memory of a spotless minister.

One of the first mass-produced books in America, *The Scarlet Letter* became an instant best-seller, selling out its first edition of 2,500 copies in ten days. It included a lengthy introduction describing the author’s experience in the Salem Custom House and a fictionalized account of his discovery of a cloth letter bound with legal documents. The book received a mixed critical response, owing to its risqué subject matter and its intensity, which some thought painful and morbid. The depth of its treatment of universal themes, however, assure it will remain a classic for as long as mankind struggles with sin and redemption.

Nathaniel Hawthorne (July 4, 1804 – May 19, 1864) was an American author best known for his dark novels and stories set in Puritan New England that grapple with sin and the nature of evil. He was born in Salem, Massachusetts to a family with deep roots in the Boston area. His father was a sea captain who died in 1808, forcing the family to live with his mother’s relatives, first in Salem and then near Sebago Lake in Maine. He graduated from Bowdoin College in 1825 and started publishing short stories that were eventually collected as *Twice-Told Tales* in 1837. He lived for a time at the Brook Farm transcendentalist Utopian community before marrying Sophia Peabody in 1842 and moving to Concord next to Ralph Waldo Emerson. In 1846 he won an appointment to the Salem Custom House and returned to Salem, where he wrote *The Scarlet Letter* in 1850. He moved to Lenox, Massachusetts that same year, where he became friends with Herman Melville and wrote *The House of the Seven Gables* and *The Blithedale Romance*. The family returned to Concord in 1852, where he wrote the campaign biography of his friend Franklin Pierce. Pierce’s election earned him an appointment as U.S. consul in Liverpool. The family returned to Concord in 1860, where he wrote *The Marble Faun*. After a period of failing health he died on a tour in the White Mountains in 1864 and was buried on Author’s Ridge in Sleepy Hollow Cemetery in Concord.