



Carmilla

J. Sheridan Le Fanu (1820 - 1873)

Read by:	Elizabeth Klett	Format:	MP3 CD in DVD case
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The Gothic novella *Carmilla* by J. Sheridan Le Fanu is one of the earliest works of vampire fiction and is considered the original prototype of the subgenre of lesbian vampire fiction. The story is presented as a chapter from the casebook of Dr. Hesselius, an unorthodox physician who is perhaps literature's first "occult doctor". It is narrated by Laura, the protagonist, daughter of a wealthy Englishman living in retirement in a castle in the deep forest of Austria. She has vivid, persistent childhood memories of a beautiful visitor in her bedchamber. A dozen years later a carriage accident brings a mysterious injured young woman into their home; Laura immediately recognizes her as the figure from her memory. At the same time her father learns of the

untimely death of the daughter of a colleague. Other young girls are succumbing to a puzzling malady. The arrival of an heirloom painting of Laura's ancestor Mircalla, Countess Karnstein, bears an identical likeness to their visitor, who is secretive, romantically forward and sometimes moody. When Laura and her father journey to their ancestral village they meet his colleague, General Spielsdorf, who relates his own ghastly story of the discovery of the vampire who caused of his daughter's death and is searching for the tomb of the Countess. The General unmasks *Carmilla* when she appears on the scene, which leads to the inevitable conflict and climax. Serialized in 1871-2 and published as a book soon after, the story has influenced many others since, not least Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw*.

Joseph Thomas Sheridan Le Fanu (August 28, 1820 – February 7, 1873), often referred to as Sheridan Le Fanu, was an Irish writer of mysteries and Gothic tales who was a leading writer of ghost stories in the 19th century, best known for *Uncle Silas*, *Carmilla*, and *The House by the Churchyard*. He was born in Dublin into a family with a literary background. His father was a clergyman in the Church of Ireland who moved the family to Abington, County Limerick and experienced constant financial problems. Sheridan studied law at Trinity College but never practiced, turning instead to journalism, writing stories and owning several newspapers. His early stories, later collected as *The Purcell Papers*, were set in Ireland and contain no small measure of gloom, supernatural visitations, madness and suicide. He turned to historical novels and "sensation fiction" popular in the mid-1800's. In 1861 he became editor of the *Dublin University Magazine*, where much of his work was serialized before publication in England. He was a meticulous craftsman who brought considerable artistry to setting and narration to create "the mysterious atmosphere in which horror darkly breeds". He is regarded by many as the most skillful writer of supernatural fiction in the English.