

# STEPHEN KING

## LISEY'S STORY

### ABOUT THE BOOK

#### IN BRIEF:

Lisey Landon is the woman behind bestselling novelist Scott Landon - not that the world knows it. For twenty-five years she has been the light to his dark, and as his wife, she was the only one who saw the truth behind the public face of the famous author - that he was a haunted man whose bestselling novels were based on a terrifying reality. Now Scott is dead, Lisey wants to concentrate on the memories of the man she loved. But the fans and academics have a different idea, determined to pull his dark secrets into the light.

#### IN DETAIL:

King has written about writers several times before, but this is the first time he has switched focus to the writer's wife. This allows him to explore career-long interests in a fascinating new way. As with Jack Torrance in *The Shining*, it's not entirely clear whether writing is a 'healthy' process for Scott Landon, but it's undoubtedly a necessary one, allowing him to deal with his disturbing life and unusual way of looking at the world.

Scott Landon is a successful author (he's won the Pulitzer and the National Book Award), and as in *Misery* he has problems with obsessive fans. This causes trouble in his life (when a fan shoots him), and after his death, as an academic is so desperate to get his hands on Landon's unpublished work that he takes to threatening Lisey. But Lisey can take of herself.

The novel goes on to explore Lisey's life after Scott's death, but it also details the twenty-five years of their relationship, and the family secrets that have bonded the couple together. Scott has a rich and disturbing family history and background, all of which has shaped his writing and his life.

As with *Dolores Claiborne*, *Gerald's Game* and *Rose Madder*, this is one of King's more feminist takes on the woman-in-peril genre, and it is one of King's unsung strengths that he is so good at female characters. This is a very exciting thriller, but it's also something more: as King himself noted, it's about myth, depression and story-making, but it's also about marriage and faithfulness.

#### QUOTES:

'King is the greatest popular novelist of our day, comparable to Dickens - a consummate and compassionate novel - one of King's very best' *Guardian*

'Thrilling, genuinely terrifying, beautifully textured and full of wonderful invention' *Daily Mail*

'A psychological thriller of extraordinary sensitivity that takes the reader deep into the dark places in us all' *Independent on Sunday*

## AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY:

At the time of publication, Stephen King made it clear that *Lisey's Story* was one of the books closest to his heart, and that Lisey was among his favourite characters. Clearly, then, this is a significant King novel and it features some of his most powerful writing.

In his interview with *The Paris Review*, King explains that the inspiration for this novel was coming back from the hospital 'after recovering from pneumonia' to find his wife had redone his study. He describes how he felt like a ghost and imagined that this is what his house would be like if he died. So he started to write a story about a famous writer who died, and about his wife, Lisey. But the novel took off and went on its own direction. At some point it stopped being a book specifically about this woman's grieving process and it started to be a book about the way people hide things. From there King started exploring the idea that repression is creation, because when we repress we make up stories to replace the past.

King has said that central to the novel is the concept of Boo'ya Moon, a haunted location which is his representation of the common pool of ideas and language that all writers can access. It's a remarkably original and compelling idea, and perhaps gives us an insight into King's creative process.

## STARTING POINTS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. What is a 'bool hunt'?
2. Who are the 'Incunks'? How sympathetic can one be to them?
3. How does Stephen King portray marriage in this novel?
4. Why doesn't Lisey like Scott's Empty Devils?
5. How does Stephen King use Scott's writing in the book?
6. Is this a horror novel?
7. Is this novel more likely to appeal to men or women? Or both? Why?
8. What do you think about the way King explores the concept of Boo'ya Moon?
9. What is the significance of the D.H. Lawrence epigraphs in the novel?
10. If you have read any other of Stephen King's novels about writers, how does this compare?
11. Stephen King argued that *Lisey's Story* tries to be more than a popular novel. How does he achieve this?

## READ EXTRACT:

The Pulitzer Prize winner, the *enfant terrible* who published his first novel at the tender age of twenty-two, goes down. Scott Landon *hits the deck*, as the saying is.

Lisey makes a supreme effort to pull out of the maddening time-glue in which she seems to be trapped. She must get free because if she doesn't reach him before the crowd surrounds him and shuts her out, they will very likely kill him with their concern. With smotherlove.

—Heeeee's hurrrrrt, someone shouts.

She screams at herself in her own head

(strap it on STRAP IT ON RIGHT NOW)

and that finally does it. The glue in which she has been packed is gone.

Suddenly she is *knifing* forward; all the world is noise and heat and sweat and jostling bodies. She blesses the speedy reality of it even as she uses her left hand

to grab the left cheek of her ass and *pull*, raking the goddam underwear out of the crack of her goddam ass, there, at least one thing about this wrong and broken day is now mended.

A co-ed in the kind of shell top where the straps tie at the shoulders in big floppy bows threatens to block her narrowing path to Scott, but Lisey ducks beneath her and hits the hottop. She won't be aware of her scraped and blistered knees until much later – until the hospital, in fact, where a kindly paramedic will notice and put lotion on them, something so cool and soothing it will make her cry with relief. But that is for later. Now it might as well be just her and Scott alone on the edge of this hot parking lot, this terrible black-and-yellow ballroom floor which must be a hundred and thirty degrees at least, maybe a hundred and fifty. Her mind tries to present her with the image of an egg frying sunnyside up in Good Ma's old black iron spider and Lisey blocks it out.

Scott is looking at her.

He gazes up and now his face is waxy pale except for the sooty smudges forming beneath his hazel eyes and the fat string of blood which has begun to flow from the right side of his mouth and down along his jaw. 'Lisey!' That thin, whooping high-altitude-chamber voice. 'Did that guy really shoot me?'

'Don't try to talk.' She puts a hand on his chest. His shirt, oh dear God, is soaked with blood, and beneath it she can feel his heart running along so fast and light; it is not the heartbeat of a human being but of a bird. *Pigeon-pulse*, she thinks, and that's when the girl with the floppy bows tied on her shoulders falls on top of her. She would land on Scott but Lisey instinctively shields him, taking the brunt of the girl's weight ('*Hey! Shit! FUCK!*' the startled girl cries out) with her back; that weight is there for only a second, and then gone. Lisey sees the girl shoot her hands out to break her fall – *oh, the divine reflexes of the young*, she thinks, as though she herself were ancient instead of just thirty-one – and the girl is successful, but then she is yipping 'Ow,ow,OW!' as the asphalt heats her skin.

'Lisey,' Scott whispers, and oh Christ how his breath screams when he pulls it in, like wind in a chimney.

'*Who pushed me?*' the girl with the bows on her shoulders is demanding. She's a-hunker, hair from a busted ponytail in her eyes, crying in shock, pain and embarrassment.

Lisey leans close to Scott. The heat of him terrifies her and fills her with pity deeper than any she thought it was possible to feel. He is actually *shivering* in the heat. Awkwardly, using only one arm, she strips off her jacket. 'Yes, you've been shot. So just be quiet and don't try to—'

'I'm so hot,' he says, and begins to shiver harder. What comes next, convulsions? His hazel eyes stare up into her blue ones. Blood runs from the corner of his mouth. She can smell it. Even the collar of his shirt is soaking in red. *His tea-cure wouldn't be any good here*, she thinks, not even sure what it is she's thinking about. *Too much blood this time. Too smucking much.* 'I'm so hot, Lisey, please give me ice.'

'I will,' she says, and puts her jacket under his head. 'I will, Scott.' *Thank God* he's wearing his sportcoat, she thinks, and then has an idea. She grabs the hunkering, crying girl by the arm. 'What's your name?'

The girl stares as if she were mad, but answers the question.

## **IF YOU LIKE *LISEY'S STORY*, YOU'LL LIKE:**

*Misery*  
*Duma Key*  
*Dolores Claiborne*  
*Insomnia*

## **OTHER BOOKS BY STEPHEN KING:**

### FICTION:

*Carrie*  
*'Salem's Lot*  
*The Shining*  
*Night Shift*  
*The Stand*  
*The Dead Zone*  
*Firestarter*  
*Cujo*  
*Different Seasons*  
*Cycle of the Werewolf*  
*Christine*  
*The Talisman* (with Peter Straub)  
*Pet Sematary*  
*It*  
*Skeleton Crew*  
*The Eyes of the Dragon*  
*The Tommyknockers*  
*The Dark Half*  
*Four Past Midnight*  
*Needful Things*  
*Gerald's Game*  
*Nightmares and Dreamscapes*  
*Rose Madder*  
*Desperation*  
*The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon*  
*Hearts in Atlantis*  
*Dreamcatcher*  
*Everything's Eventual*  
*From a Buick 8*  
*Cell*  
*Lisey's Story*  
*The Dark Tower I: The Gunslinger*  
*The Dark Tower II: The Drawing of the Three*  
*The Dark Tower III: The Waste Lands*  
*The Dark Tower IV: Wizard and Glass*  
*The Dark Tower V: Wolves of the Calla*  
*The Dark Tower VI: Song of Susannah*  
*The Dark Tower VII: The Dark Tower*

By Stephen King as Richard Bachman

*Thinner*  
*The Running Man*  
*The Bachman Books*  
*The Regulators*  
*Blaze*

### NON-FICTION:

*Danse Macabre*  
*On Writing (A Memoir of the Craft)*

## **WEBSITE LINKS:**

[www.stephenking.co.uk](http://www.stephenking.co.uk)  
[www.stephenking.com](http://www.stephenking.com)