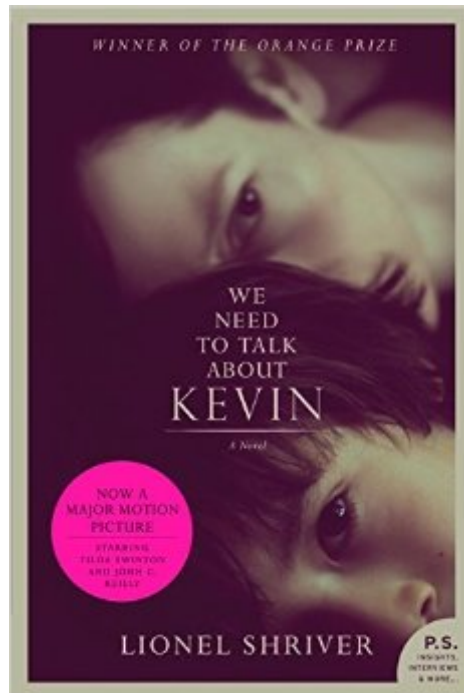


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We Need To Talk About Kevin Tie-in: A Novel



Synopsis

Now a major motion picture by Lynne Ramsay, starring Tilda Swinton and John C. Reilly, Lionel Shriver's resonant story of a mother's unsettling quest to understand her teenage son's deadly violence, her own ambivalence toward motherhood, and the explosive link between them reverberates with the haunting power of high hopes shattered by dark realities. Like Shriver's charged and incisive later novels, including *So Much for That* and *The Post-Birthday World*, *We Need to Talk About Kevin* is a piercing, unforgettable, and penetrating exploration of violence, family ties, and responsibility, a book that the *Boston Globe* describes as "sometimes searing, sometimes impossible to put down."

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"We Need To Talk About Kevin" is a disquieting, provocative, and brilliantly written novel about a mother, desperately attempting to understand why her son, 15-year-old Kevin, brutally, with premeditation, murdered seven of his fellow classmates, a cafeteria worker and his English teacher in a Columbine-style school massacre. There have been nationwide discussions on the cause of events like these - especially during the 1990s when it seemed like school shootings ran rampant throughout the US. In Pearl, Paducah, Springfield, Littleton, seemingly normal kids, kids who had almost everything a child could want, became terribly derailed. Some argue that the proliferation of and easy access to guns is the cause; others that the excess of violence in movies, TV programs and video games induce violent behavior in children and adolescents. The one question almost everyone seems to have in common is, "What were these murderous kids' parents like?" "Didn't

they recognize symptoms of violence in their own children?"Eva Khatchadourian, Kevin's bereft mother, narrates this novel through a series of compelling letters to her estranged husband, Franklin. She examines her son's life, from conception to his terrible act of violence, trying to understand the why of it. What becomes clear early on is that Eva tortures herself with blame. She is guilt-ridden that her shortcomings as a parent might have caused Kevin's evil act, his violent behavior, his very nature. She must have failed, she must have been deficient as a mother, for her boy to commit such a chilling crime. She also considers that neither nature nor nurture are solely responsible for shaping a child's character. Her honest, introspective correspondence to her beloved husband causes the reader to consider that some children just might be born bad. How and when are psychopaths created? The reader is pulled back and forth between empathy and blame, anger and grief, and perhaps, ultimately to forgiveness. Through Eva's perspective we watch a story unfold. A happy, almost idyllic marriage to Franklin; a brilliant career in a business which she, herself, created; her ambivalent feelings when she became pregnant, an event which interfered with her career; the indifference she felt when she held her son for the first time; Kevin's difficult infancy - he refused his mother's milk and didn't like to be held by her; his total manipulation of his father, who believed Kevin could do no wrong, putting a permanent strain on the marriage; Kevin's lack of empathy and cruel streak, which he blatantly flaunted in front of his mother and hid from his Dad; and Eva's fear that her dislike for her son, which she went overboard to conceal, would damage him - further escalating his already violent nature. "We Need To Talk About Kevin" examines how a heinous event can impact a town, a marriage, a family and an individual. It also causes the reader to reflect on the concept of unconditional love. Lionel Shriver's clear, crisply crafted prose builds tension throughout her novel, ultimately leading to a stunning conclusion. Her narrative is almost perfectly paced. This is an extraordinary psychological study that gripped me, riveted me, from the first page to the last. And the author ably portrays the complexity and the horror of the act and the consequences. I was seriously left breathless and horribly saddened after finishing the book. This is most definitely not an "up" novel or a light read. However, it may be my favorite book of 2004 and I cannot recommend it highly enough. I have purchased 2 more of Ms. Shriver's novels as a result of reading this one. JANA

This book had my rapt attention for a weekend. I could not stop reading. While seeming a bit pretentious at first, the prose is consistent, sometimes beautiful, and definitely a part of the person we come to know as Eva Katchadourian. Once I became used to her style, it did not bother me; I understood it was Eva, not Lionel Shriver. The characterization in this novel is excellent, particularly

that of Eva. She is possibly the most complete character I've ever read. I was annoyed at her at times, and even bewildered at her reactions to certain situations. However, I always found Eva to be a sympathetic character. She makes many mistakes (and so did Franklin, her husband...he sometimes exasperated me so much I wanted to throw the book!), which she admits to. Eva villifies Kevin when he is just an infant, which forms an ever-growing wedge between herself and Franklin. At the same time, it seems that she did what most normal, flawed people would do in her situation. Her letters let us know how much she loves Franklin still, despite the way he seemed to turn against her sometimes due to their disagreements about Kevin (Franklin never really accepts that Kevin could be the sociopath Eva suspects him to be). Eva's story is disturbing, harrowing, and gripping. It is hard to forget...it does not just go away when you put the book down. This book affected me in a way that no book has before. It made me question whether I ever want to have a child. It gave me a nightmare. It even made me feel trepidatious about going back to the schools (I am a substitute teacher). It even, as another reviewer put it, "left a dent in my heart." I am glad to have experienced such a well-written, moving story, but at the same time, this story left me with a sense of sadness, melancholy, and anxiety that I suspect will have a grip on me for a few days. Do not pick this up for light reading. If you want to become absorbed in a story that is important, timely, provocative, and emotionally gripping, please give this book a chance.

This is one of the most chilling and compulsively readable books I've opened in a long time. As you read Eva Khatchadourian's letters to her estranged husband you think this is what it must be like for parents whose child has just murdered classmates and a popular teacher. As Eva reveals in her letters, she knew something was wrong with Kevin from the moment of his birth when he turned away from her breast snarling and screaming. The anger does not wane, even though outwardly he was a passive, disinterested child. She blames her own mixed feelings toward him, but her beloved husband Franklin fiercely defends the boy whenever she asks why babysitters never come back for a second time and other families go great lengths to keep Kevin away from their own children. And Eva doesn't like him. No matter how hard she tries--and she does try very hard, moving to the suburbs, staying home, none of which she wants to do--she does not like her son. Since you know from the beginning that Kevin is in juvenile prison for killing his classmates, you might think that the suspense in the story will come from finding out how he planned his spree and carried it out. You would be very, very mistaken. Very late in *We Need to Talk About Kevin* Lionel Shriver introduces a twist that is completely unexpected and totally shocking. These are words too frequently used in describing thrillers which

rarely deliver the unexpected or the shocking. Believe me, in this book, those words do not begin to describe the wallop Shriver packs in the last quarter of the novel. I was unfamiliar with Lionel Shriver, and will (after a recovery period) look for her other novels. She digs fearlessly into the back of her characters' minds and the bottoms of their hearts. Read this book.

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