

Praise for *Cujo*

“Hits the jugular . . . King’s most disturbing horror yet.”

—*The New York Times*

“Just when your blood pressure is back to normal, Stephen King is at it again . . . with a nightmare his fans won’t forget.”

—*The Kansas City Star*

“He builds up the suspense, holds back the dynamite until you’re screaming for it, and then lets you have it.”

—*Minneapolis Tribune*

“It grabs you and holds you and won’t let go . . . excruciating suspense . . . a genuine page-turner.”

—*Chattanooga Times*

“As grisly as *Carrie*, as ominous as *The Shining*, as eerie and absorbing as *The Dead Zone*, it throbs with evil and shock.”

—*Saturday Review*

“It is nothing less than the state of the art in horror fiction.”

—*The Atlanta Journal*

“The master of modern horror has done it again . . . Reading *Cujo* is like having a razor blade drawn along the edge of your subconscious where all the demons and monsters are lurking.”

—*The Pittsburgh Press*

“A heart-pounding, gut-wrenching thriller that haunts your dreams”

—*Newport News Daily Press*

“The reigning grand master of horror has written a novel that tightens and tapers to a steel-edged denouement that is driven home with the impact of a stake through

the heart”

—*St. Louis Globe-Democrat*

“Stephen King has created the ultimate horror!”

—*Houston Chronicle*

Thank you for downloading this Scribner eBook.

Join our mailing list and get updates on new releases, deals, bonus content and other great books from Scribner and Simon & Schuster.

[CLICK HERE TO SIGN UP](#)

or visit us online to sign up at
eBookNews.SimonandSchuster.com

STEPHEN KING



A NOVEL

SCRIBNER

New York London Toronto Sydney New Delhi

This book is for my brother, David, who held my hand crossing West Broad Street, and who taught me how to make skyhooks out of old coathangers. The trick was so damned good I just never stopped.

I love you, David.

*About suffering they were never wrong,
The Old Masters: how well they understood
Its human position; how it takes place
While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully along . . .*

—W. H. AUDEN, “Musée des Beaux Arts”

*Old Blue died and he died so hard
He shook the ground in my back yard.
I dug his grave with a silver spade
And I lowered him down with a golden chain.
Every link you know I did call his name,
I called, “Here, Blue, you good dog, you.”*

—FOLK SONG

“Nope, nothing wrong here.”

—THE SHARP CEREAL PROFESSOR

ONCE UPON A TIME,

not so long ago, a monster came to the small town of Castle Rock, Maine. He killed a waitress named Alma Frechette in 1970; a woman named Pauline Toothaker and a junior high school student named Cheryl Moody in 1971; a pretty girl named Carol Dunbarger in 1974; a teacher named Etta Ringgold in the fall of 1975; finally, a grade-schooler named Mary Kate Hendrasen in the early winter of that same year.

He was not werewolf, vampire, ghoul, or unnameable creature from the enchanted forest or from the snowy wastes; he was only a cop named Frank Dodd with mental and sexual problems. A good man named John Smith uncovered his name by a kind of magic, but before he could be captured—perhaps it was just as well—Frank Dodd killed himself.

There was some shock, of course, but mostly there was rejoicing in that small town, rejoicing because the monster which had haunted so many dreams was dead, dead at last. A town's nightmares were buried in Frank Dodd's grave.

Yet even in this enlightened age, when so many parents are aware of the psychological damage they may do to their children, surely there was one parent somewhere in Castle Rock—or perhaps one grandmother—who quieted the kids by telling them that Frank Dodd would get them if they didn't watch out, if they weren't good. And surely a hush fell as children looked toward their dark windows and thought of Frank Dodd in his shiny black vinyl raincoat, Frank Dodd who had choked . . . and choked . . . and choked.

He's out there, I can hear the grandmother whispering as the wind whistles down the chimney pipe and snuffles around the old pot lid crammed in the stove hole. He's out there, and if you're not good, it may be his face you see looking in your bedroom window after everyone in the house is asleep except you; it may be his smiling face you see peeking at you from the closet in the middle of the night, the STOP sign he held up when he crossed the little children in one hand, the razor he used to kill himself in the other . . . so shhh, children . . . shhh . . . shhhh.

But for most, the ending was the ending. There were nightmares to be sure, and children who lay wakeful to be sure, and the empty Dodd house (for his mother had a stroke shortly afterwards and died) quickly gained a reputation as a haunted house and was avoided; but these were passing phenomena—the perhaps unavoidable side effects of a chain of senseless murders.

But time passed. Five years of time.

The monster was gone, the monster was dead. Frank Dodd moldered inside his coffin.

Except that the monster never dies. Werewolf, vampire, ghoul, unnameable creature from the wastes. The monster never dies.

It came to Castle Rock again in the summer of 1980.

• • •

Tad Trenton, four years old, awoke one morning not long after midnight in May of that year, needing to go to the bathroom. He got out of bed and walked half asleep toward the white light thrown in a wedge through the half-open door, already lowering his pajama pants. He urinated forever, flushed, and went back to bed. He pulled the covers up, and that was when he saw the creature in his closet.

Low to the ground it was, with huge shoulders bulking above its cocked head, its eyes amber-glowing pits—a thing that might have been half man, half wolf. And its eyes rolled to follow him as he sat up, his scrotum crawling, his hair standing on end, his breath a thin winter-whistle in his throat: mad eyes that laughed, eyes that promised horrible death and the music of screams that went unheard; something in the closet.

He heard its purring growl; he smelled its sweet carrion breath.

Tad Trenton clapped his hands to his eyes, hitched in breath, and screamed.

A muttered exclamation in another room—his father.

A scared cry of “What was that?” from the same room—his mother.

Their footfalls, running. As they came in, he peered through his fingers and saw it there in the closet, snarling, promising dreadfully that they might come, but they would surely go, and that when they did—

The light went on. Vic and Donna Trenton came to his bed, exchanging a look of concern over his chalky face and his staring eyes, and his mother said—no, snapped, “I told you three hot dogs was too many, Vic!”

And then his daddy was on the bed, Daddy’s arm around his back, asking him what was wrong.

Tad dared to look into the mouth of his closet again.

The monster was gone. Instead of whatever hungry beast he had seen, there were two uneven piles of blankets, winter bedclothes which Donna had not yet gotten around to taking up to the cut-off third floor. These were stacked on the chair which Tad used to stand on when he needed something from the high closet shelf. Instead of the shaggy, triangular head, cocked sideways in a kind of predatory questioning

gesture, he saw his teddybear on the taller of the two piles of blankets. Instead of pitted and baleful amber eyes, there were the friendly brown glass balls from which his Teddy observed the world.

“What’s wrong, Tadder?” his daddy asked him again.

“There was a monster!” Tad cried. “In my closet!” And he burst into tears.

His mommy sat with him; they held him between them, soothed him as best they could. There followed the ritual of parents. They explained there were no monsters; that he had just had a bad dream. His mommy explained how shadows could sometimes look like the bad things they sometimes showed on TV or in the comic books, and Daddy told him everything was all right, fine, that nothing in their good house could hurt him. Tad nodded and agreed that it was so, although he knew it was not.

His father explained to him how, in the dark, the two uneven piles of blankets had looked like hunched shoulders, how the teddybear had looked like a cocked head, and how the bathroom light, reflecting from Teddy’s glass eyes, had made them seem like the eyes of a real live animal.

“Now look,” he said. “Watch me close, Tadder.”

Tad watched.

His father took the two piles of blankets and put them far back in Tad’s closet. Tad could hear the coathangers jingling softly, talking about Daddy in their coathanger language. That was funny, and he smiled a little. Mommy caught his smile and smiled back, relieved.

His daddy came out of the closet, took Teddy, and put him in Tad’s arms.

“And last but not least,” Daddy said with a flourish and a bow that made both Tad and Mommy giggle, “ze chair.”

He closed the closet door firmly and then put the chair against the door. When he came back to Tad’s bed he was still smiling, but his eyes were serious.

“Okay, Tad?”

“Yes,” Tad said, and then forced himself to say it. “But it was there, Daddy. I saw it. Really.”

“Your *mind* saw something, Tad,” Daddy said, and his big, warm hand stroked Tad’s hair. “But you didn’t see a monster in your closet, not a real one. There are no monsters, Tad. Only in stories, and in your mind.”

He looked from his father to his mother and back again—their big, well-loved faces.

“Really?”

“Really,” his mommy said. “Now I want you to get up and go pee, big guy.”