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THE STAND

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STEPHEN KING

THE STAND

Stephen King is the author of more than fifty books, all of them worldwide bestsellers. Among his most recent are *11/22/63*; *Full Dark, No Stars*; *Under the Dome*; *Just After Sunset*; *Duma Key*; *Lisey's Story*; *Cell*; and the concluding novels in the Dark Tower saga: *Wolves of the Calla*, *Song of Susannah*, and *The Dark Tower*. His acclaimed nonfiction book, *On Writing*, is also a bestseller. He was the recipient of the 2003 National Book Foundation Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters, and in 2007, he received the Grand Master Award from the Mystery Writers of America. He lives in Maine with his wife, novelist Tabitha King.

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THE STAND

A NOVEL



STEPHEN
KING



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FOR TABBY

this dark chest of wonders.

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Acknowledgements

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The Stand is a work of fiction, as its subject matter makes perfectly clear. Many of the events occur in real places—such as Ogunquit, Maine; Las Vegas, Nevada; and Boulder, Colorado—and with these places I have taken the liberty of changing them to whatever degree best suited the course of my fiction. I hope that those readers who live in these and the other real places that are mentioned in this novel will not be too upset by my “monstrous impertinence,” to quote Dorothy Sayers, who indulged freely in the same sort of thing.

Other places, such as Arnette, Texas, and Shoyo, Arkansas, are as fictional as the plot itself.

Special thanks are due to Russell Dorr (P.A.) and Dr. Richard Herman, both of the Bridgton Family Medical Center, who answered my questions about the nature of the flu, and its peculiar way of mutating every two years or so, and to Susan Artz Manning of Castine, who proofed the original manuscript.

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S.K.

A PREFACE IN TWO PARTS

PART 1: TO BE READ BEFORE PURCHASE

There are a couple of things you need to know about this version of *The Stand* right away, even before you leave the bookstore. For that reason I hope I've caught you early—hopefully standing there by the *K* section of new fiction, with your other purchases tucked under your arm and the book open in front of you. In other words, I hope I've caught you while your wallet is still safely in your pocket. Ready? Okay; thanks. I promise to be brief.

First, this is *not* a new novel. If you hold misapprehensions on that score, let them be dispelled right here and right now, while you are still a safe distance from the cash register which will take money out of your pocket and put it in mine. *The Stand* was originally published over ten years ago.

Second, this is not a brand-new, entirely different version of *The Stand*. You will not discover old characters behaving in new ways, nor will the course of the tale branch off at some point from the old narrative, taking you, Constant Reader, in an entirely different direction.

This version of *The Stand* is an *expansion* of the original novel. As I've said, you won't find old characters behaving in strange new ways, but you will discover that almost *all* of the characters were, in the book's original form, doing *more* things, and if I didn't think some of those things were interesting—perhaps even enlightening—I would never have agreed to this project.

If this is not what you want, don't buy this book. If you have bought it already, I hope you saved your sales receipt. The bookshop where you made your purchase will want it before granting you credit or a cash refund.

If this expansion *is* something you want, I invite you to come along with me just a little farther. I have lots to tell you, and I think we can talk better around the corner.

In the dark.

PART 2: TO BE READ AFTER PURCHASE

This is not so much a Preface, actually, as it is an explanation of why this new version of *The Stand* exists at all. It was a long novel to begin with, and this expanded version will be regarded by some—perhaps many—as an act of indulgence by an author whose works have been successful enough to allow it. I hope not, but I'd have to be pretty stupid not to realize that such criticism is in the offing. After all, many critics of the novel regarded it bloated and overlong to begin with.

Whether the book *was* too long to begin with, or has become so in this edition, is a matter I leave to the individual reader. I only wanted to take this little space to say that I am republishing *The Stand* as it was originally written not to serve myself or any individual reader, but to serve a body of readers who have asked to have it. I would not offer it if I myself didn't think those portions which were dropped from the original manuscript made the story a richer one, and I'd be a liar if I didn't admit I am curious as to what its reception will be.

I'll spare you the story of how *The Stand* came to be written—the chain of thought which produces a novel rarely interests anyone but aspiring novelists. They tend to believe there is a “secret formula” to writing a commercially successful novel, but there isn't. You get an idea; at some point another idea kicks in; you make a connection or a series of them between ideas; a few characters (usually little more than shadows at first) suggest themselves; a possible ending occurs to the writer's mind (although when the ending comes, it's rarely much like the one the writer envisioned); and at some point, the novelist sits down with a paper and pen, a typewriter, or a word cruncher. When asked, “How do you write?” I invariably answer, “One word at a time,” and the answer is invariably dismissed. But that is all it is. It sounds too simple to be true, but consider the Great Wall of China, if you will: one stone at a time, man. That's all. One stone at a time. But I've read you can see that motherfucker from space without a telescope.

For readers who *are* interested, the story is told in the final chapter of *Danse Macabre*, a rambling but user-friendly overview of the horror genre I

published in 1981. This is not a commercial for that book; I'm just saying the tale is there if you want it, although it's told not because it is interesting in itself but to illustrate an entirely different point.

For the purposes of this book, what's important is that approximately four hundred pages of manuscript were deleted from the final draft. The reason was not an editorial one; if that had been the case, I would be content to let the book live its life and die its eventual death as it was originally published.

The cuts were made at the behest of the accounting department. They toted up production costs, laid these next to the hardcover sales of my previous four books, and decided that a cover price of \$12.95 was about what the market would bear (compare that price to this one, friends and neighbors!). I was asked if I would like to make the cuts, or if I would prefer someone in the editorial department to do it. I reluctantly agreed to do the surgery myself. I think I did a fairly good job, for a writer who has been accused over and over again of having diarrhea of the word processor. There is only one place—Trashcan Man's trip across the country from Indiana to Las Vegas—that seems noticeably scarred in the original version.

If all of the story is there, one might ask, then why bother? Isn't it indulgence after all? It better not be; if it is, then I have spent a large portion of my life wasting my time. As it happens, I think that in really good stories, the whole is always greater than the sum of the parts. If that were not so, the following would be a perfectly acceptable version of "Hansel and Gretel":

Hansel and Gretel were two children with a nice father and a nice mother. The nice mother died, and the father married a bitch. The bitch wanted the kids out of the way so she'd have more money to spend on herself. She bullied her spineless, soft-headed hubby into taking Hansel and Gretel into the woods and killing them. The kids' father relented at the last moment, allowing them to live so they could starve to death in the woods instead of dying quickly and mercifully at the blade of his knife. While they were wandering around, they found a house made out of candy. It was owned by a witch who was into cannibalism. She locked them up and told them that when they were good and fat, she was going to eat them. But the kids got the best of her. Hansel shoved her into her

own oven. They found the witch's treasure, and they must have found a map, too, because they eventually arrived home again. When they got there, Dad gave the bitch the boot and they lived happily ever after. The End.

I don't know what you think, but for me, that version's a loser. The story is there, but it's not elegant. It's like a Cadillac with the chrome stripped off and the paint sanded down to dull metal. It goes somewhere, but it ain't, you know, *boss*.

I haven't restored all four hundred of the missing pages; there is a difference between doing it up right and just being downright vulgar. Some of what was left on the cutting room floor when I turned in the truncated version deserved to be left there, and there it remains. Other things, such as Frannie's confrontation with her mother early in the book, seem to add that richness and dimension which I, as a reader, enjoy deeply. Returning to "Hansel and Gretel" for just a moment, you may remember that the wicked stepmother demands that her husband bring her the hearts of the children as proof that the hapless woodcutter has done as she has ordered. The woodcutter demonstrates one dim vestige of intelligence by bringing her the hearts of two rabbits. Or take the famous trail of breadcrumbs Hansel leaves behind, so he and his sister can find their way back. Thinking dude! But when he attempts to follow the backtrail, he finds that the birds have eaten it. Neither of these bits are strictly essential to the plot, but in another way they *make* the plot—they are great and magical bits of storytelling. They change what could have been a dull piece of work into a tale which has charmed and terrified readers for over a hundred years.

I suspect nothing added here is as good as Hansel's trail of breadcrumbs, but I have always regretted the fact that no one but me and a few in-house readers at Doubleday ever met that maniac who simply calls himself The Kid ... or witnessed what happens to him outside a tunnel which counterpoints another tunnel half a continent away—the Lincoln Tunnel in New York, which two of the characters negotiate earlier in the story.

So here is *The Stand*, Constant Reader, as its author originally intended for it to roll out of the showroom. All its chrome is now intact, for better or for worse. And the final reason for presenting this version is the simplest. Although it has never been my favorite novel, it is the one people who like

my books seem to like the most. When I speak (which is as rarely as possible), people always speak to me about *The Stand*. They discuss the characters as though they were living people, and ask frequently, “What happened to so-and-so?” ... as if I got letters from them every now and again.

I am inevitably asked if it is ever going to be a movie. The answer, by the way, is probably yes. Will it be a good one? I don’t know. Bad or good, movies nearly always have a strange diminishing effect on works of fantasy (of course there are exceptions; *The Wizard of Oz* is an example which springs immediately to mind). In discussions, people are willing to cast various parts endlessly. I’ve always thought Robert Duvall would make a splendid Randall Flagg, but I’ve heard people suggest such people as Clint Eastwood, Bruce Dern, and Christopher Walken. They all *sound* good, just as Bruce Springsteen would seem to make an interesting Larry Underwood, if he ever chose to try acting (and, based on his videos, I think he would do very well ... although my personal choice would be Marshall Crenshaw). But in the end, I think it’s perhaps best for Stu, Larry, Glen, Frannie, Ralph, Tom Cullen, Lloyd, and that dark fellow to belong to the reader, who will visualize them through the lens of imagination in a vivid and constantly changing way no camera can duplicate. Movies, after all, are only an illusion of motion comprised of thousands of still photographs. The imagination, however, moves with its own tidal flow. Films, even the best of them, freeze fiction—anyone who has ever seen *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* and then reads Ken Kesey’s novel will find it hard or impossible not to see Jack Nicholson’s face on Randle Patrick McMurphy. That is not necessarily bad ... but it *is* limiting. The glory of a good tale is that it is limitless and fluid; a good tale belongs to each reader in its own particular way.

Finally, I write for only two reasons: to please myself and to please others. In returning to this long tale of dark Christianity, I hope I have done both.

October 24, 1989

Outside the street’s on fire
In a real death waltz

*Between what's flesh and fantasy
And the poets down here
Don't write nothin at all
They just stand back and let it all be
And in the quick of the night
They reach for their moment
And try to make an honest stand
But they wind up wounded
Not even dead
Tonight in Jungle Land.*

—Bruce Springsteen

*And it was clear she couldn't go on!
The door was opened and the wind appeared,
The candles blew and then disappeared,
The curtains flew and then he appeared,
Said, "Don't be afraid,
Come on, Mary,"
And she had no fear
And she ran to him
And they started to fly ...
She had taken his hand ...
"Come on, Mary;
Don't fear the Reaper!"*

—Blue Öyster Cult

*WHAT'S THAT SPELL?
WHAT'S THAT SPELL?
WHAT'S THAT SPELL?*

—Country Joe and the Fish

THE CIRCLE OPENS

We need help, the Poet reckoned.

—*Edward Dorn*

“Sally.”

A mutter.

“Wake up now, Sally.”

A louder mutter: *leeme lone*.

He shook her harder.

“Wake up. You got to wake up!”

Charlie.

Charlie’s voice. Calling her. For how long?

Sally swam up out of sleep.

First she glanced at the clock on the night table and saw it was quarter past two in the morning. Charlie shouldn’t even be here; he should be on shift. Then she got her first good look at him and something leaped up inside her, some deadly intuition.

Her husband was deathly pale. His eyes started and bulged from their sockets. The car keys were in one hand. He was still using the other to shake her, although her eyes were open. It was as if he hadn’t been able to register the fact that she was awake.

“Charlie, what is it? What’s wrong?”

He didn’t seem to know what to say. His Adam’s apple bobbed futilely but there was no sound in the small service bungalow but the ticking of the clock.

“Is it a fire?” she asked stupidly. It was the only thing she could think of which might have put him in such a state. She knew his parents had perished in a housefire.

“In a way,” he said. “In a way it’s worse. You got to get dressed, honey. Get Baby LaVon. We got to get out of here.”

“Why?” she asked, getting out of bed. Dark fear had seized her. Nothing seemed right. This was like a dream. “Where? You mean the back yard?” But she knew it wasn’t the back yard. She had never seen Charlie look

afraid like this. She drew a deep breath and could smell no smoke or burning.

“Sally, honey, don’t ask questions. We have to get away. Far away. You just go get Baby LaVon and get her dressed.”

“But should I ... is there time to pack?”

This seemed to stop him. To derail him somehow. She thought she was as afraid as she could be, but apparently she wasn’t. She recognized that what she had taken for fright on his part was closer to raw panic. He ran a distracted hand through his hair and replied, “I don’t know. I’ll have to test the wind.”

And he left her with this bizarre statement which meant nothing to her, left her standing cold and afraid and disoriented in her bare feet and babydoll nightie. It was as if he had gone mad. What did testing the wind have to do with whether or not she had time to pack? And where was far away? Reno? Vegas? Salt Lake City? And ...

She put her hand against her throat as a new idea struck her.

AWOL. Leaving in the middle of the night meant Charlie was planning to go AWOL.

She went into the small room which served as Baby LaVon’s nursery and stood for a moment, indecisive, looking at the sleeping infant in her pink blanket suit. She held to the faint hope that this might be no more than an extraordinarily vivid dream. It would pass, she would wake up at seven in the morning just like usual, feed Baby LaVon and herself while she watched the first hour of the “Today” show, and be cooking Charlie’s eggs when he came off-shift at 8 A.M., his nightly tour in the Reservation’s north tower over for another night. And in two weeks he would be back on days and not so cranky and if he was sleeping with her at night she wouldn’t have crazy dreams like this one and—

“Hurry it *up!*” he hissed at her, breaking her faint hope. “We got just time to throw a few things together ... but for Christ’s sake, woman, if you love her”—he pointed at the crib—“you get her dressed!” He coughed nervously into his hand and began to yank things out of their bureau drawers and pile them helter-skelter into a couple of old suitcases.

She woke up Baby LaVon, soothing the little one as best she could; the three-year-old was cranky and bewildered at being awakened in the middle

of the night, and she began to cry as Sally got her into underpants, a blouse, and a romper. The sound of the child's crying made her more afraid than ever. She associated it with the other times Baby LaVon, usually the most angelic of babies, had cried in the night: diaper rash, teething, croup, colic. Fear slowly changed to anger as she saw Charlie almost run past the door with a double handful of her own underwear. Bra straps trailed out behind him like the streamers from New Year's Eve noisemakers. He flung them into one of the suitcases and slammed it shut. The hem of her best slip hung out, and she just bet it was torn.

"What *is* it?" she cried, and the distraught tone of her voice caused Baby LaVon to burst into fresh tears just as she was winding down to sniffles. "Have you gone crazy? They'll send soldiers after us, Charlie! *Soldiers!*"

"Not tonight they won't," he said, and there was something so sure in his voice that it was horrible. "Point is, sugar-babe, if we don't get our asses in gear, we ain't never gonna make it off'n the base. I don't even know how in hell I got out of the tower. Malfunction somewhere, I guess. Why not? Everything else sure-God malfunctioned." And he uttered a high, loonlike laugh that frightened her more than anything else had done. "The baby dressed? Good. Put some of her clothes in that other suitcase. Use the blue tote-bag in the closet for the rest. Then we're going to get the hell out. I think we're all right. Wind's blowing east to west. Thank God for that."

He coughed into his hand again.

"Daddy!" Baby LaVon demanded, holding her arms up. "Want Daddy! Sure! Horsey-ride, Daddy! Horsey-ride! Sure!"

"Not now," Charlie said, and disappeared into the kitchen. A moment later, Sally heard the rattle of crockery. He was getting her pin-money out of the blue soup-dish on the top shelf. Some thirty or forty dollars she had put away—a dollar, sometimes fifty cents, at a time. Her *house* money. It was real, then. Whatever it was, it was really real.

Baby LaVon, denied her horsey ride by her daddy, who rarely if ever denied her anything, began to weep again. Sally struggled to get her into her light jacket and then threw most of her clothes into the tote, cramming them in helter-skelter. The idea of putting anything else into the other suitcase was ridiculous. It would burst. She had to kneel on it to snap the catches. She found herself thanking God Baby LaVon was trained, and there was no need to bother with diapers.

Charlie came back into the bedroom, and now he *was* running. He was still stuffing the crumpled ones and fives from the soup-dish into the front pocket of his suntans. Sally scooped Baby LaVon up. She was fully awake now and could walk perfectly well, but Sally wanted her in her arms. She bent and snagged the tote-bag.

“Where we going, Daddy?” Baby LaVon asked. “I was aseepin.”

“Baby can be aseepin in the car,” Charlie said, grabbing the two suitcases. The hem of Sally’s slip flapped. His eyes still had that white, starey look. An idea, a growing certainty, began to dawn in Sally’s mind.

“Was there an accident?” she whispered. “Oh Jesus Mary and Joseph, there was, wasn’t there? An accident. Out *there*.”

“I was playing solitaire,” he said. “I looked up and saw the clock had gone from green to red. I turned on the monitor. Sally, they’re all—”

He paused, looked at Baby LaVon’s eyes, wide and, although still rimmed with tears, curious.

“They’re all D-E-A-D down there,” he said. “All but one or two, and they’re probably gone now.”

“What’s D-E-D, Daddy?” Baby LaVon asked.

“Never mind, honey,” Sally said. Her voice seemed to come to her from down a very long canyon.

Charlie swallowed. Something clicked in his throat. “Everything’s supposed to mag-lock if the clock goes red. They got a Chubb computer that runs the whole place and it’s supposed to be fail-safe. I saw what was on the monitor, and I jumped out the door. I thought the goddam thing would cut me in half. It should have shut the second the clock went red, and I don’t know how long it *was* red before I looked up and noticed it. But I was almost to the parking lot before I heard it thump shut behind me. Still, if I’d looked up even thirty seconds later, I’d be shut up in that tower control room right now, like a bug in a bottle.”

“What is it? What—”

“I dunno. I don’t *want* to know. All I know is that it ki—that it K-I-L-L-E-D them quick. If they want me, they’ll have to catch me. I was gettin hazard pay, but they ain’t payin me enough to hang around here. Wind’s blowing west. We’re driving east. Come on, now.”

Still feeling half-asleep, caught in some awful grinding dream, she followed him out to the driveway where their fifteen-year-old Chevy stood,

quietly rusting in the fragrant desert darkness of the California night.

Charlie dumped the suitcases in the trunk and the tote-bag in the back seat. Sally stood for a moment by the passenger door with the baby in her arms, looking at the bungalow where they had spent the last four years. When they had moved in, she reflected, Baby LaVon was still growing inside her body, all her horsey-rides ahead of her.

“Come on!” he said. “Get in, woman!”

She did. He backed out, the Chevy’s headlights momentarily splashing across the house. Their reflection in the windows looked like the eyes of some hunted beast.

He was hunched tensely over the steering wheel, his face drawn in the dim glow of the dashboard instruments. “If the base gates are closed, I’m gonna try to crash through.” And he meant it. She could tell. Suddenly her knees felt watery.

But there was no need for such desperate measures. The base gates were standing open. One guard was nodding over a magazine. She couldn’t see the other; perhaps he was in the head. This was the outer part of the base, a conventional army vehicle depot. What went on at the hub of the base was of no concern to these fellows.

I looked up and saw the clock had gone red.

She shivered and put her hand on his leg. Baby LaVon was sleeping again. Charlie patted her hand briefly and said: “It’s going to be all right, hon.”

By dawn they were running east across Nevada and Charlie was coughing steadily.

CAPTAIN TRIPS

JUNE 16-JULY 4, 1990

*I called the doctor on the telephone,
Did doctor , doctor; please,
I got this feeling, rocking and reeling,
Tell me, what can it be?
Is it some new disease?*

—*The Silvers*

*Baby, can you dig your man?
He's a righteous man,
Baby, can you dig your man?*

—*Larry Underwood*