



# We Need to Talk About Kevin

By *Lionel Shriver*

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Who is to blame for teenage atrocity? Narrator Eva Khatchadourian's son, Kevin, murdered seven of his fellow high school students, a cafeteria worker, and the much-loved teacher who tried to befriend him. This novel is an examination of the effect tragedy has on a town, a marriage and a family.

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## **We Need to Talk About Kevin** By Lionel Shriver Bibliography

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## Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

A number of fictional attempts have been made to portray what might lead a teenager to kill a number of schoolmates or teachers, Columbine style, but Shriver's is the most triumphantly accomplished by far. A gifted journalist as well as the author of seven novels, she brings to her story a keen understanding of the intricacies of marital and parental relationships as well as a narrative pace that is both compelling and thoughtful. Eva Khatchadourian is a smart, skeptical New Yorker whose impulsive marriage to Franklin, a much more conventional person, bears fruit, to her surprise and confessed disquiet, in baby Kevin. From the start Eva is ambivalent about him, never sure if she really wanted a child, and he is balefully hostile toward her; only good-old-boy Franklin, hoping for the best, manages to overlook his son's faults as he grows older, a largely silent, cynical, often malevolent child. The later birth of a sister who is his opposite in every way, deeply affectionate and fragile, does nothing to help, and Eva always suspects his role in an accident that befalls little Celia. The narrative, which leads with quickening and horrifying inevitability to the moment when Kevin massacres seven of his schoolmates and a teacher at his upstate New York high school, is told as a series of letters from Eva to an apparently estranged Franklin, after Kevin has been put in a prison for juvenile offenders. This seems a gimmicky way to tell the story, but is in fact surprisingly effective in its picture of an affectionate couple who are poles apart, and enables Shriver to pull off a huge and crushing shock far into her tale. It's a harrowing, psychologically astute, sometimes even darkly humorous novel, with a clear-eyed, hard-won ending and a tough-minded sense of the difficult, often painful human enterprise. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc.

From [Booklist](#)

*\*Starred Review\** In a series of brutally introspective missives to her husband, Franklin, from whom she is separated, Eva tries to come to grips with the fact that their 17-year-old son, Kevin, has killed seven students and two adults... Guiltily she recalls how, as a successful writer, she was terrified of having a child. Was it for revenge, then, that from the moment of his birth Kevin was the archetypal difficult child, screaming for hours, refusing to nurse, driving away countless nannies, and intuitively learning to "divide and conquer" his parents? When their daughter, loving and patient Celia, is born, Eva feels vindicated; but as the gap between her view of Kevin as a "Machiavellian miscreant" and Franklin's efforts to explain away their son's aberrant behavior grows wider, they find themselves facing divorce. In crisply crafted sentences that cut to the bone of her feelings about motherhood, career, family, and what it is about American culture that produces child killers, Shriver yanks the reader back and forth between blame and empathy, retribution and forgiveness. Never letting up on the tension, Shriver ensures that, like Eva, the reader grapples with unhealed wounds.

*Deborah Donovan*

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Review

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"An underground feminist hit." -- New York Observer

"Impossible to put down." -- Boston Globe

"Powerful [and] harrowing." -- Entertainment Weekly

"Furiously imagined." -- Seattle Times

Furiously imagined. --Seattle Times

A slow, magnetic descent into hell that is as fascinating as it is disturbing. --Cleveland Plain Dealer

Shriver handles this material, with its potential for cheap sentiment and soap opera plot, with rare skill and sense. --Newark Star Ledger

Powerful [and] harrowing. --Entertainment Weekly

Ms. Shriver takes a calculated risk...but the gamble pays off as she strikes a tone of compelling intimacy. -- Wall Street Journal

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**Dennis Bryant:**

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