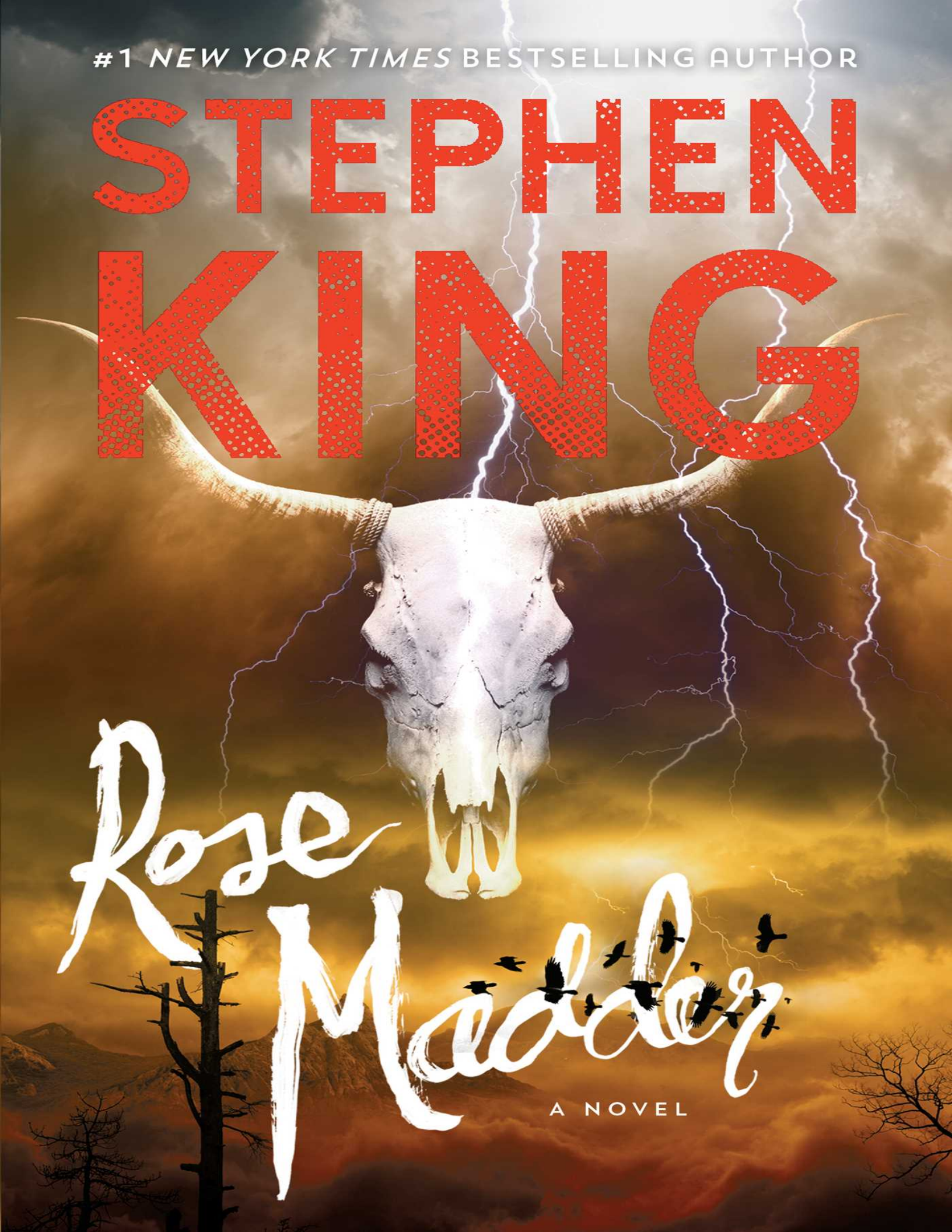


#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

STEPHEN KING

Rose Maddox

A NOVEL



Praise for *Rose Madder*

“Riveting, engrossing . . . packed with suspense.”

—*People*

“An eerie, remarkably mature and moving novel.”

—*The Washington Post*

“Breathlessly paced suspense and horror . . . horrific thrills . . . it’s King’s best!”

—*Miami Herald*

“Vivid, startling . . . a compelling page-turner.”

—*Houston Chronicle*

“A corker, tense and frightening throughout . . . Rose is the most richly portrayed female King’s ever created.”

—*Detroit Free Press*

“A boiling hot shocker.”

—*The Cleveland Plain Dealer*

“Rousing . . . vivid and sensitive.”

—*The New York Times*

“One of King’s most engrossing horror novels! Relentlessly paced and brilliantly orchestrated . . . a phantasmagorical roller-coaster ride, peopled by a broad array of indelibly characterized men and women and fueled by an air of danger immediate and overwhelming.”

—*Publishers Weekly*

“Stephen King is a marvelous writer. His style crackles. His story line skitters along, pausing for the kaboom, then moves to the next terror. His imagination is beyond the edge. . . . He had me hooked.”

—*The Baltimore Sun*

“Stephen King can make your heart pound and turn you into a vampire thirsting for blood. . . . He gets more skillful with every book!”

—Chris Chase, *Books*

“King raises the literary ante *Rose Madder* certainly won’t disappoint King’s golden horde of fans, but this eerie and remarkably mature work may even win over some readers from literature’s garden party district—if they don’t mind stepping through a few puddles of gore and goo.”

—*Chicago Sun-Times*

“A whole lot of horror . . . but Stephen King readers aren’t a faint lot. They can take it.”

—*New York Daily News*

“A taught thriller-novel . . . about as good as they come.”

—*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*

“Disturbing, haunting . . . King paints a vivid nightmare.”

—*The Oklahoman*

“Enjoyable . . . the kind of horror and suspense mixed with flights of fantasy King readers relish.”

—*Baton Rouge magazine*

“An evocative work . . . *Rose Madder* is best when the author places us inside the twisted circuits of Norman’s brain, or reveals the slow blooming of Rose’s personality as she moves from fear to a tenuous engagement with the world. Rose is a strong character, one of the pleasures of this book!”

—*New York Newsday*

“Masterful . . . King is in a league of his own!”

—*Richmond Times-Dispatch*

“A work filled with terror from the very first page . . . Fiction has seldom produced a villain so evil. . . . highly recommended.”

—*Montgomery Advertiser*

“Be prepared to get sucked into the story. . . . It’s not easy to get away from this book.”

—*The Des Moines Register*

“An imaginative page-turner . . . achingly real and chilling.”

—*Oceanside Blade-Citizen*

“Both grisly and surprisingly moving.”

—*The New York Times Book Review*

“Compelling, relentless . . . keeps readers on the edge of their seats . . . shows King at the height of his considerable skill.”

—*Chattanooga Times*

“An engaging and well-written novel . . . utilizing the very real horror of everyday life.”

—*South Bend Tribune*

“This is the real stuff . . . his best novel since *Misery*.”

—*The Wichita Eagle*

STEPHEN
KING

ROSE MADDER

A NOVEL

SCRIBNER

New York London Toronto Sydney New Delhi

This book is for Joan Marks.

*I'm really Rosie,
And I'm Rosie Real,
You better believe me,
I'm a great big deal . . .*

—Maurice Sendak

*A bloody
egg yolk. A burnt hole
spreading in a sheet. An en-
raged rose threatening to bloom.*

—May Swenson

Prologue
SINISTER KISSES

She sits in the corner, trying to draw air out of a room which seemed to have plenty just a few minutes ago and now seems to have none. From what sounds like a great distance she can hear a thin *whoop-whoop* sound, and she knows this is air going down her throat and then sliding back out again in a series of feverish little gasps, but that doesn't change the feeling that she's drowning here in the corner of her living room, looking at the shredded remains of the paperback novel she was reading when her husband came home.

"Not that she cares much. The pain is too great for her to worry about such minor matters as respiration, or how there seems to be no air in the air she is breathing. The pain has swallowed her as the whale reputedly swallowed Jonah, that holy draft-dodger. It throbs like a poison sun glowing deep down in the middle of her, in a place where until tonight there was only the quiet sense of a new thing growing.

There has never been any pain like this pain, not that she can remember—not even when she was thirteen and swerved her bike to avoid a pothole and wiped out, bouncing her head off the asphalt and opening up a cut that turned out to be exactly eleven stitches long. What she remembered about that was a silvery jolt of pain followed by starry dark surprise which had actually been a brief faint . . . but that pain had not been this agony. This terrible agony. Her hand on her belly registers flesh that is no longer like flesh at all; it is as if she has been unzipped and her living baby replaced with a hot rock.

Oh God please, she thinks. Please let the baby be okay.

But now, as her breath finally begins to ease a little, she realizes that the baby is *not* okay, that he has made sure of that much, anyway. When you're four months pregnant the baby is still more a part of you than of itself, and when you're sitting in a corner with your hair stuck in strings to your sweaty cheeks and it feels as if you've swallowed a hot stone—

Something is putting sinister, slippery little kisses against the insides of her thighs.

"No," she whispers, "*no*. Oh my dear sweet God, *no*. Good God, sweet God, dear God, *no*."

Let it be sweat, she thinks. Let it be sweat . . . or maybe I peed myself. Yes, that's probably it. It hurt so bad after he hit me the third time that I peed myself and didn't

even know it. That's it.

Except it isn't sweat and it isn't pee. It's blood. She's sitting here in the corner of the living room, looking at a dismembered paperback lying half on the sofa and under the coffee-table, and her womb is getting ready to vomit up the baby it has so far carried with no complaint or problem whatsoever.

"No," she moans, "no, God, please say no."

She can see her husband's shadow, as twisted and elongated as a cornfield effigy or the shadow of a hanged man, dancing and bobbing on the wall of an archway leading from the living room into the kitchen. She can see shadow-phone pressed to shadow-ear, and the long corkscrew shadow-cord. She can even see his shadow-fingers pulling the kinks out of the cord, holding for a moment and then releasing it back into its former curls again, like a bad habit you just can't get rid of.

Her first thought is that he's calling the police. Ridiculous, of course—he *is* the police.

"Yes, it's an emergency," he's saying. "You're goddam tooting it is, beautiful, she's pregnant." He listens, slipping the cord through his fingers, and when he speaks again his tone is testy. Just that faint irritation in his voice is enough to renew her terror and fill her mouth with a steely taste. Who would cross him, contradict him? Oh, who would be so foolish as to do that? Only someone who didn't know him, of course—someone who didn't know him the way *she* knew him. "Of *course* I won't move her, do you think I'm an idiot?"

Her fingers creep under her dress and up her thigh to the soaked, hot cotton of her panties. *Please*, she thinks. How many times has that word gone through her mind since he tore the book out of her hands? She doesn't know, but here it is again. *Please let the liquid on my fingers be clear. Please, God. Please let it be clear.*

But when she brings her hand out from under her dress the tips of her fingers are red with blood. As she looks at them, a monstrous cramp rips through her like a hacksaw blade. She has to slam her teeth together to stifle a scream. She knows better than to scream in this house.

"Never mind all that bullshit, just get here! Fast!" He slams the phone back into its cradle.

His shadow swells and bobs on the wall and then he's standing in the archway, looking at her out of his flushed and handsome face. The eyes in that face are as expression-less as shards of glass twinkling beside a country road.