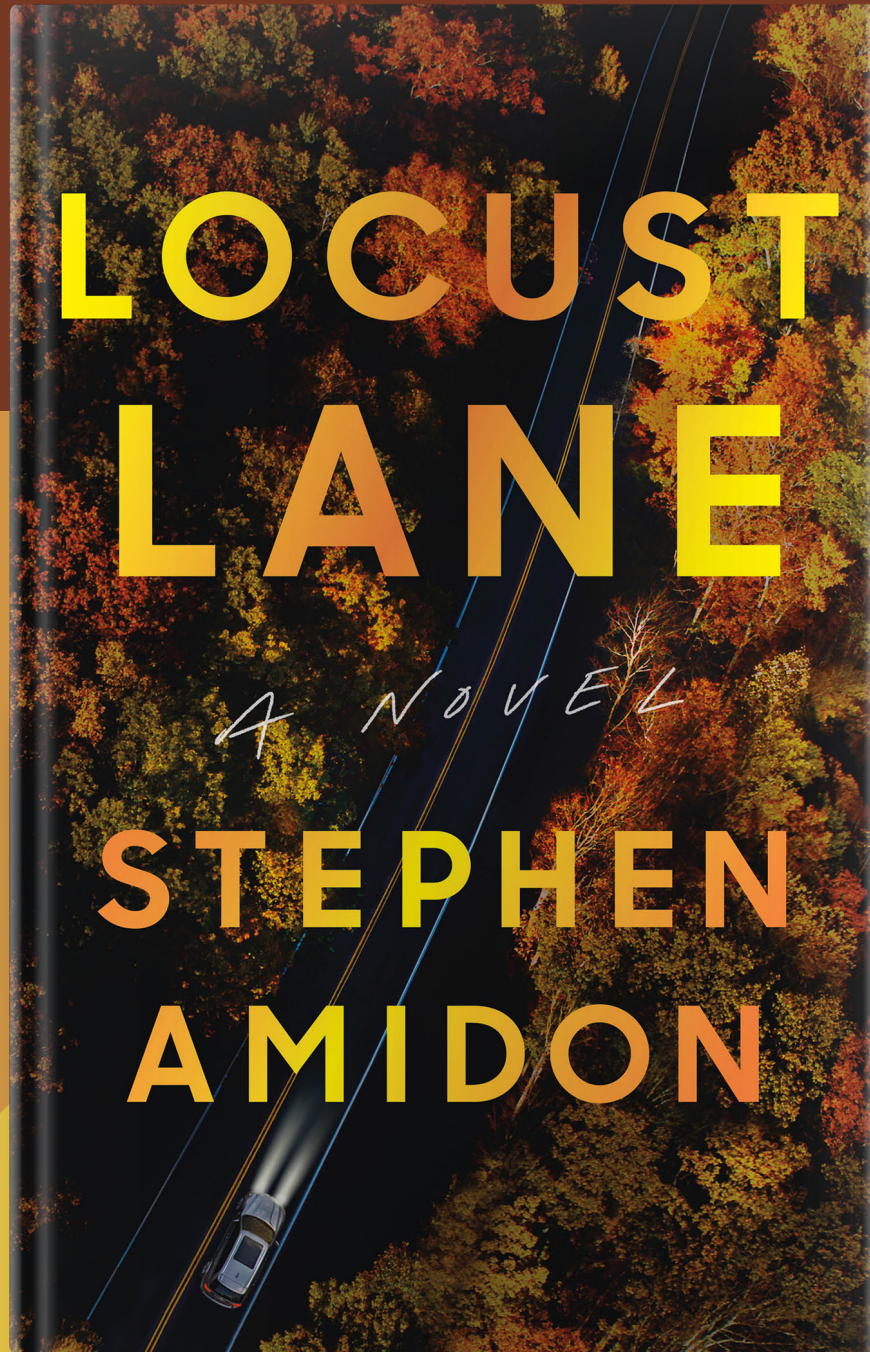


BOOK CLUB KIT



“This book is perfect for any book club looking for a good, can’t-put-down, page-turner of a thriller. How far would you go to protect the ones you love?”

—JUST FOR THE THRILL OF IT BOOK CLUB (DALLAS, GA)

AN INTERVIEW

with Stephen Amidon



STEPHEN AMIDON was born in Chicago and grew up on the East Coast. He lived in London for twelve years before returning to the United States in 1999. He now lives in Massachusetts and Torino, Italy. His books have been published in sixteen countries and include two works of nonfiction, a collection of short stories, and seven novels, including *Human Capital*, adapted as a film directed by Marc Meyers in 2019, and *Security*, also adapted as a film and released by Netflix in summer 2021.

As thriller fans will discover, there is a lot to discuss after reading this book! What main themes did you set out to explore in writing *Locust Lane*?

The book's main theme is one that has interested me throughout my career: In a crisis, how far would you go to protect your child? What secrets would you keep? What laws would you break? In *Locust Lane*, every main character is a parent dealing with a child in trouble, whether they are a victim of crime, struggle with addiction, or face grave accusations. In a larger sense, having children presents a person with intense, often contradictory demands. It's an almost impossible job. How do you teach a young person right and wrong? How can you be objective about a kid who is so close to you, so much a part of you? Can parental love actually be damaging? You can read every parenting book ever printed, listen to every podcast, devour every blog, pick the brains of all your family and friends — but at the end of the day, you are going to be in situations where you have to make decisions and take actions for which you are not prepared. And this is where the drama starts.

The narrative is told from alternating perspectives of the parents in the community, rather than the teenagers, who were closest to the victim and the crime. Why did you decide to tell this story from their various points of view?

My novel is about the terrible event that happens in that big house on Locust Lane, but it is also about the aftermath of the crime as it plays out among people who weren't there but must deal with it. As any parent of teenagers can tell you, their child's life is riddled with enigmas. In many ways, raising a teen is like reading a mystery story. What should we believe? Which clues are potentially serious? What is your child saying behind the closed doors of chats and texts? What are they doing when they are out of sight? Given this dynamic, I thought it would be interesting to put the reader in the position of the bemused parent instead of the kids who actually know what happened.

Most of your fiction has been set in the suburbs, from your 1991 short story collection *Subdivision to Locust Lane*. What keeps drawing you back to the suburbs again and again?

On the simplest level, it's where I grew up and where I have lived for much of my adult life. It's what I know. Perhaps this is why two of the greatest influences on me as a writer — John Cheever and Richard Yates — saw the suburbs as their turf. But there's a deeper reason at work: The divide between the seemingly serene facade of the suburbs and their often dark, dangerous interiors provides rich dramatic ground for me. For many people, life is a quest for security, for normality and predictability. I believe the American suburbs might be the greatest expression of those desires. Cities are chaotic, the countryside is lonely, but the suburbs, with their freshly cut lawns and three-car garages, offer a promise of safety and community. Which is why when things go wrong there, when hidden secrets and passions and crimes emerge, it can seem all the more powerful. How can there be a bloody murder on a street with million-dollar houses and an annual block party? How can someone who coaches Little League be a killer? Was that really the soccer mom's Suburban involved in the deadly hit-and-run?

One compelling plot driver focuses on certain individuals in the community trying to "control the narrative." In the social media age, do you think it is easier or more difficult to do this? And how have you seen modern-day crime narratives change as a result of such easily accessible tools of manipulation?

Social media had turned us all into storytellers. With the power granted us by Twitter and Facebook, the desire for each of us to "control the narrative" definitely becomes more tempting. In the old days, the reporting on an incident like the one depicted in *Locust Lane* tended to be fairly monolithic: The police and reporters would investigate, and then the story would be reported in newspapers and on television news.

Even eyewitnesses had to rely on the traditional media to voice their testimony. Counter-narratives were difficult to broadcast. Now we live in a world of thunderous whispers, where gossip, speculation, and downright lies often overwhelm factual reporting. In so many cases, there is no longer an official story, but rather a cacophony of competing narratives that are impossible to sort out. In my novel, as the events on Locust Lane unfold, two of the main families involved compete to see who can control the narrative, with one relying on a toxic Twitter thread while the other resorts to using its power to sway local newspapers. In a way, it's a battle of new money versus old. The irony being that in the end it is one of the oldest forms of communication — a hand-delivered letter — that may determine the story's outcome.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 Emerson's tight-knit community plays a significant role in the story. Why do you think the author chose to set the novel in the suburbs?
- 2 The author told the story from the parents' perspectives rather than the teenagers'. How did this affect your feelings toward the teenagers as the story progressed? Were the parents' voices compelling?
- 3 If you were the parent of any of these kids, how might you have handled the situation?

Submitted by Bluffton Public Library Galley Book Group (Bluffton, OH)

- 4 What role did social media play in the story? Was it helpful in solving the case? Could social media ever be helpful in regards to true crime?
- 5 One of the central themes of the book is how far people are willing to go to protect their families. Do you think Alice, Michel, and Celia all went too far, or were any of their actions justified?
- 6 Patrick's and Danielle's grief run parallel, despite their different circumstances. What do you think motivated Patrick to help Danielle discover Eden's murderer?
- 7 Christopher's friendship with Jack proves to be toxic. Why do you think Christopher had tried so hard to maintain the friendship?
- 8 How did Alice's past influence her relationships with Hannah, Celia, Geoff, and Michel? Is it possible for people to let go of their past, or will it always influence them?
- 9 Did this novel change the way you think about race, privilege, and the American justice system?



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 10** Discuss Celia's actions, especially after she discovers the truth about the murder. What does this reveal about her motivations and beliefs as a character? Do you empathize with her?

Submitted by Book Club (Palmyra, NY)

- 11** Do you feel Eden received justice in the end?
- 12** What do you think will happen next for the murderer? For the rest of the characters?

If you decide to adopt *Locust Lane* for your book club, we would love to hear about it! Please let us know by emailing us at reader@celadonbooks.com or post on social media using the hashtags **#CeladonBookClub** and **#LocustLaneBook**.

Thank you for your consideration.

Your friends at Celadon Books

