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Inside the O'Briens: A Novel

By Lisa Genova



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**A *New York Times* bestseller ? A *Library Journal* Best Books of 2015 Pick ?
A *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* Best Books of 2015 Pick ? A GoodReads Top Ten
Fiction Book of 2015 ? A *People Magazine* Great Read**

From *New York Times* bestselling author and neuroscientist Lisa Genova comes a “heartbreaking...very human novel” (Matthew Thomas, author of *We Are Not Ourselves*) that does for Huntington’s disease what her debut novel *Still Alice* did for Alzheimer’s.

Joe O’Brien is a forty-three-year-old police officer from the Irish Catholic neighborhood of Charlestown, Massachusetts. A devoted husband, proud father of four children in their twenties, and respected officer, Joe begins experiencing bouts of disorganized thinking, uncharacteristic temper outbursts, and strange, involuntary movements. He initially attributes these episodes to the stress of his job, but as these symptoms worsen, he agrees to see a neurologist and is handed a diagnosis that will change his and his family’s lives forever: Huntington’s disease.

Huntington’s is a lethal neurodegenerative disease with no treatment and no cure, and each of Joe’s four children has a 50 percent chance of inheriting their father’s disease. While watching her potential future in her father’s escalating symptoms, twenty-one-year-old daughter Katie struggles with the questions this test imposes on her young adult life. As Joe’s symptoms worsen and he’s eventually stripped of his badge and more, Joe struggles to maintain hope and a sense of purpose, while Katie and her siblings must find the courage to either live a life “at risk” or learn their fate.

Praised for writing that “explores the resilience of the human spirit” (*San Francisco Chronicle*), Lisa Genova has once again delivered a novel as powerful and unforgettable as the human insights at its core.



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Editorial Review

Review

"This heartbreaking book tells the whole story of how a major illness affects a family. Genova's gift is to show that things do work out, in a sense. Her very human novel teaches us to keep living, to lean on each other and be there to be leaned on." (Matthew Thomas, New York Times bestselling author of WE ARE NOT OURSELVES)

"This novel of siblings rocked by their father's Huntington's disease is a total tearjerker, but ultimately it's a tribute to family love." (*Glamour*)

"An intimate, heartbreaking look at life with Huntington's disease." (*Marie Claire*)

"Genova...compassionately details how an illness—this time Huntington's disease—can destroy not only the afflicted, but those who love them as well." (*People Magazine*)

"An unsparing, heart-piercing portrait...compelling." (*The Washington Post*)

"A moving drama." (*US Weekly*)

"A gut-wrenching and memorable read." (*Library Journal, Starred Review*)

"Compelling and masterful." (*NYJOURNALOFBOOKS.com*)

"*Inside the O'Briens* is...about resilience and hope." (*Bookreporter.com*)

"Genova's book will move readers as well as demystify a condition sometimes called 'the cruelest disease known to man.'" (*Publishers Weekly*)

"Sympathetic, absorbing, multifaceted characters compel the reader's compassion. While Genova's background in neuroscience allows her to portray medical issues accurately, the heart of the O'Briens' story is human....Poignant and painful, warm and redemptive, *Inside the O'Briens* displays Genova's established strengths in bringing neuroscience to the lay reader, and portraying the power of love." (*Shelf Awareness*)

"*Inside the O'Briens* . . . promises to do for Huntington's disease, what *Still Alice* did for Alzheimer's." (*Huffington Post*)

"Lisa Genova's deep empathy for her characters shines through this poignant and uplifting story about family, grief and the resilience of the human spirit. Kudos to this amazing writer for showing us—once again—the transformative powers of even the most devastating events. Do not miss this fabulous novel." (Barbara Shapiro, author of *THE MURALIST* and *THE ART FORGER*)

"For the characters in a Lisa Genova novel, there is no way out, for genetic destiny has sealed their fate. And yet, for us as readers, there also is no way out, for we have no desire to look away. In his fear and courage, Joe O'Brien is an American hero. Huntington's disease will claim his life, but not his capacity to love. This is Genova's genius. A bold, skillful writer at the height of her narrative powers, she makes us long to hope for the hopeless and comfort the condemned. In their hard journeys, we find the small shining promise of

every single ordinary day." (Jacquelyn Mitchard, author *THE DEEP END OF THE OCEAN* and *TWO IF BY SEA*)

"Lisa Genova's subtle, finely tuned prose gains momentum until you don't know whether to laugh, cry, or give thanks. Like all of her work, *Inside the O'Briens* is brimming with candor, pathos, and deeply human characters. I didn't want the book to end!" (Vanessa Diffenbaugh, author of *THE LANGUAGE OF FLOWERS* and *WE NEVER ASKED FOR WINGS*)

About the Author

Lisa Genova is the *New York Times* bestselling author of *Inside the O'Briens*, *Love Anthony*, *Left Neglected*, and *Still Alice*. Her first novel, *Still Alice*, has been adapted into a film starring Julianne Moore, Alec Baldwin, and Kristen Stewart. Lisa graduated valedictorian from Bates College with a degree in biopsychology and holds a PhD in neuroscience from Harvard University. She travels worldwide speaking about Alzheimer's disease, traumatic brain injury, and autism. She has appeared on *Dr. Oz*, *The Diane Rehm Show*, CNN, *Chronicle*, Fox News, and Canada AM and is featured in the Emmy Award-winning documentary film *To Not Fade Away*. She lives with her family in Massachusetts.

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Inside the O'Briens

CHAPTER 1



Damn woman is always moving his things. He can't kick off his boots in the living room or set his sunglasses down on the coffee table without her relocating them to "where they belong." Who made her God in this house? If he wants to leave a stinking pile of his own shit right in the middle of the kitchen table, then that's where it should stay until he moves it.

Where the fuck is my gun?

"Rosie!" Joe hollers from the bedroom.

He looks at the time: 7:05 a.m. He's going to be late for roll call if he doesn't get the hell out of here pronto, but he can't go anywhere without his gun.

Think. It's so hard to think lately when he's in a hurry. Plus it's a thousand degrees hotter than hell in here. It's been sweltering for June, in the high eighties all week, and barely cools down at night. Terrible sleeping weather. The air in the house is a thick swamp, today's heat and humidity already elbowing in on what was trapped inside yesterday. The windows are open, but that doesn't help a lick. His white Hanes T-shirt is sticking to his back beneath his vest, pissing him off. He just showered and could already use another.

Think. He took a shower and got dressed—pants, T-shirt, Kevlar vest, socks, boots, gun belt. Then he took his gun out of the safe, released the trigger lock, and then what? He looks down at his right hip. It's not there. He can feel the missing weight of it without even looking. He's got his magazine pouch, handcuffs, Mace, radio, and service baton, but no gun.

It's not in the safe, not on his dresser, not in the top drawer of his dresser, not on the unmade bed. He looks over at Rosie's bureau. Nothing but the Virgin Mary centered on an ivory doily. She sure ain't going to help him.

St. Anthony, where the fuck is it?

He's tired. He worked traffic detail last night over at the Garden. Friggin' Justin Timberlake concert got out late. So he's tired. So what? He's been tired for years. He can't imagine being so tired that he would be careless enough to misplace his loaded gun. A lot of guys with as many years on the force as Joe grow complacent about their service weapon, but he never has.

He stomps down the hall, passes the two other bedrooms, and pokes his head into their only bathroom. Nothing. He storms into the kitchen with his hands on his hips, the heel of his right hand searching for the top of his gun out of habit.

His four not-yet-showered, bed-headed, sleepy teenagers are up and seated around the tiny kitchen table for breakfast—plates of undercooked bacon, runny scrambled eggs, and burnt white toast. The usual. Joe scans the room and spots his gun, his loaded gun, on the mustard-yellow Formica counter next to the sink.

"Mornin', Dad," offers Katie, his youngest, smiling but shy about it, sensing that something is off.

He ignores Katie. He picks up his Glock, secures it in its holster, and then aims the crosshairs of his wrath at Rosie.

"Whaddaya doin' with my gun there?"

"What are you talking about?" says Rosie, who is standing by the stove in a pink tank top and no bra, shorts, and bare feet.

"You're always movin' my shit around," says Joe.

"I never touch your gun," says Rosie, standing up to him.

Rosie is petite at five feet nothing and a hundred pounds soaking wet. Joe's no giant either. He's five feet nine with his patrol boots on, but everyone thinks of him as being taller than he is, probably because he's barrel-chested and has muscular arms and a deep, husky voice. At thirty-six, he's got a bit of a gut, but not bad for his age or considering how much of his life he spends sitting in a cruiser. He's normally playful and easygoing, a pussycat really, but even when he's smiling and there's that twinkle in his blue eyes, everyone knows he's old-school tough. No one messes with Joe. No one but Rosie.

She's right. She never touches his gun. Even after all these years of his being on the force, she's never grown comfortable with having a firearm in the house, even though it's always in the safe or in his top dresser drawer, where it's trigger-locked, or on his right hip. Until today.

"Then how the fuck did it get there?" he asks, pointing to the space next to the sink.

"Watch your mouth," she says.

He looks over at his four kids, who have all stopped eating to witness the show. He narrows in on Patrick. God love him, but he's sixteen going on stupid. This would be just the kind of knucklehead move he would pull, even after all the lectures these kids have endured about the gun.

"So which one of you did this?"

They all stare and say nothing. The Charlestown code of silence, eh?

“Who picked up my gun and left it by the sink?” he demands, his voice booming. Silence will not be an option.

“Wasn’t me, Dad,” says Meghan.

“Me either,” says Katie.

“Not me,” says JJ.

“I didn’t do it,” says Patrick.

What every criminal he’s ever arrested says. Everyone’s a fuckin’ saint. They all look up at him, blinking and waiting. Patrick shoves a rubbery slice of bacon into his mouth and chews.

“Have some breakfast before you go, Joe,” says Rosie.

He’s too late to have breakfast. He’s too late because he’s been looking for his goddamn gun that someone took and then left on the kitchen counter. He’s late and feeling out of control, and he’s hot, too hot. The air in this cramped room is too soupy to breathe, and it feels as if the heat from the stove and six bodies and the weather is stoking something already threatening to boil over inside him.

He’s going to be late for roll call, and Sergeant Rick McDonough, five years younger than Joe, is going to have a word with him again or maybe even write him up. He can’t stomach the humiliating thought of it, and something inside him explodes.

He grabs the cast-iron skillet on the stove by the handle and sidearms it across the room. It smashes a sizable hole in the drywall not far from Katie’s head, then lands with a resounding BANG on the linoleum floor. Rusty brown bacon grease drips down the daisy-patterned wallpaper like blood oozing from a wound.

The kids are wide-eyed and silent. Rosie says nothing and doesn’t move. Joe storms out of the kitchen, down the narrow hallway, and steps into the bathroom. His heart is racing, and his head is hot, too hot. He splashes cold water over his hair and face and wipes himself dry with a hand towel.

He needs to leave now, right now, but something in his reflection snags him and won’t let go.

His eyes.

His pupils are dilated, black and wide with adrenaline, like shark eyes, but that’s not it. It’s the expression in his eyes that has him arrested. Wild, unfocused, full of rage. His mother.

It’s the same unbalanced gaze that used to terrify him as a young boy. He’s looking in the mirror, late for roll call, glued to the wretched eyes of his mother, who used to stare at him just like this when she could do nothing else but lie in her bed in the psych ward at the state hospital, mute, emaciated, and possessed, waiting to die.

The devil in his mother’s eyes, dead for twenty-five years, is now staring at him in the bathroom mirror.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Kathryn Sheffield:

In this 21st hundred years, people become competitive in every way. By being competitive at this point, people have do something to make them survives, being in the middle of often the crowded place and notice by simply surrounding. One thing that often many people have underestimated this for a while is reading. Yep, by reading a guide your ability to survive increase then having chance to stand than other is high. For you who want to start reading any book, we give you that Inside the O'Briens: A Novel book as starter and daily reading guide. Why, because this book is greater than just a book.

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