

Book Club Conversation Starters

About the book

Buying a rundown motel to start a new life — what could possibly go wrong? Well for a start there's the pregnant daughter Liv who doesn't want to be there. There's a young criminal who comes to work there. There's the lack of time and money to properly renovate the place. And the first guests come with problems of their own.

In this funny and moving novel, prize-winning author Stephanie Johnson turns her wry eye on us.

About Stephanie

Stephanie Johnson is the author of several collections of poetry and of short stories, some plays and adaptations, and many fine novels. *The New Zealand Listener* commented that 'Stephanie Johnson is a writer of talent and distinction. Over the course of an award-winning career — during which she has written plays, poetry, short stories and novels — she has become a significant presence in the New Zealand literary landscape, a presence cemented and enhanced by her roles as critic and creative writing teacher.' *The Shag Incident* won the Montana Deutz Medal for Fiction in 2003, and *Belief* was shortlisted for the same award. Stephanie has also won the Bruce Mason Playwrights Award and Katherine Mansfield Fellowship, and was the 2001 Literary Fellow at the University of Auckland. Many of her novels have been published in Australia, America and the United Kingdom. She co-founded the Auckland Writers and Readers Festival with Peter Wells in 1999.



Praise for *Everything Changes*

'What a fabulous read. Stephanie Johnson's characters choose an old motel with little to offer except an amazing view in order to start a 'new life'. Their first guests are a classic cast of the sorrowful and dysfunctional that every-day life throws at us these days. They are joined by their pregnant daughter, a mysterious young criminal from next door and a dog that knows more than all of them put together. The story is fast paced, and unpredictable, it's smart, contemporary and heartbreaking all at once. And, just when it was about to make me cry, Johnson startled me into wild laughter. This is her best book ever, and I loved every page of it.' – Fiona Kidman

A note from the author for book clubs

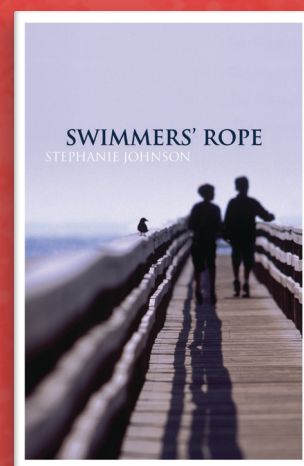
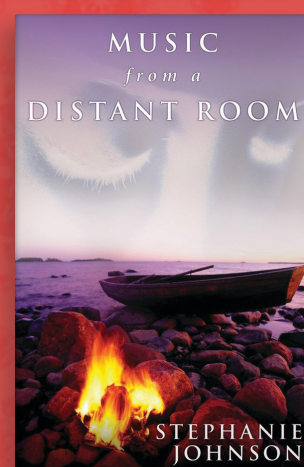
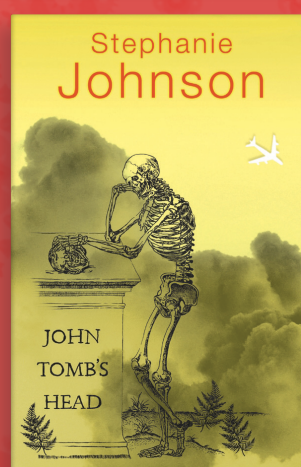
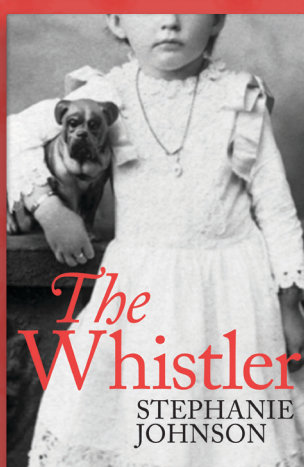
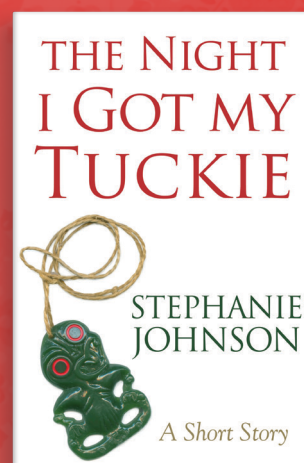
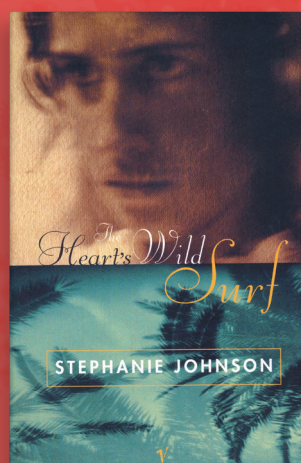
Everything Changes is mostly set in Northland, an area I know well. Members of my family live in the far north, and since childhood I have spent a lot of time there. My novels *The Shag Incident* and *Belief* are partly set in the district.

The novel is about retreat, both physical and psychological – how we may want it, how we might find it and then not want it, and how different characters may respond to it. Every character, even the dog, is in their own way retreating. I wrote the novel before the pandemic, so in some ways it is set in a world that has passed. In other respects the world is pretty much the same, with similar problems. Mothers and daughters will still battle it out, people still fear the apocalypse and long for the rural idyll, no matter how unsuited they are to it.

Conversation Starters

- 1** Has feminism further condemned mothers to lives of servitude? In other words, how do we encourage our daughters to help with housework and cooking, when we have supposedly cast off those shackles?
- 2** Fatherhood in the 21st century is very different to how it was in the past. Fathers are more likely to express affection for their children and to be less disciplinarian. How has this dynamic affected marriage/co-parenthood? Do you think Davie is too soft on Liv, or just right?
- 3** In our so-called 'Age of Anxiety' we are constantly offered choice. How do the characters in the novel cope with big change, which for some of them comes relatively late in life?
- 4** Col's dream for Skyreaders' Retreat is that guests will abstain from the internet and read books. Do you think this is a realistic ambition? Further, is it something to aspire to?
- 5** Do you think of Liv as the villain of the novel, or is her behaviour understandable given the loss of her brother and the following period of parental neglect? Does personal tragedy allow a person to abjure cultural expectations of kindness?
- 6** Aidan McConochie enacts the final retreat in dying by his own hand. How do you respond to this, and to Col and Davie's response to his death?
- 7** Liv and Juju fall in love. What are the chances of their relationship surviving motherhood?
- 8** Choir dreams of creating a War of Thorns theme park on the top of the Brynderwyns. How likely do you think it is that he will achieve it?

Other books by Stephanie Johnson



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We'd love to hear what you think!



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