



Lullabies for Little Criminals: A Novel

By Heather O'Neill

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Lullabies for Little Criminals: A Novel By Heather O'Neill

Heather O'Neill's critically acclaimed debut novel, with a new introduction from the author to celebrate its ten-year anniversary

Baby, all of thirteen years old, is lost in the gangly, coltish moment between childhood and the strange pulls and temptations of the adult world. Her mother is dead; her father, Jules, is scarcely more than a child himself and is always on the lookout for his next score. Baby knows that “chocolate milk” is Jules’ slang for heroin and sees a lot more of that in her house than the real thing. But she takes vivid delight in the scrappy bits of happiness and beauty that find their way to her, and moves through the threat of the streets as if she’s been choreographed in a dance.

Soon, though, a hazard emerges that is bigger than even her hard-won survival skills can handle. Alphonse, the local pimp, has his eye on her for his new girl—and what the johns don’t take he covets for himself. If Baby cannot learn to become her own salvation, his dark world threatens to claim her, body and soul.

Channeling the artlessly affecting voice of her thirteen-year-old heroine with extraordinary accuracy and power, Heather O'Neill’s debut novel blew readers away when it was first published ten years ago. Now it’s sure to capture its next decade of readers as Baby picks her pathway along the edge of the abyss to arrive at a place of redemption, and of love.

Featuring a new introduction from the author

CBC Canada reads winner, Paragraphe Hugh MacLennan Prize for Fiction winner, Orange Prize for Fiction finalist, Governor General’s Literary Award finalist, International Impac Dublin Literary Award finalist

Praise for *Lullabies for Little Criminals*

“A vivid portrait of life on skid row.”—*People*

“A nuanced, endearing coming-of-age novel you won’t want to miss.”—*Quill And Quire*

“Vivid and poignant. . . . A deeply moving and troubling novel.”—*The Independent* (London)

“O’Neill is a tragicomedienne par excellence. . . . You will not want to miss this tender depiction of some very mean streets.”—*Montreal Review of Books*

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

A down-and-dirty debut novel, a harrowing recital of a young life, a funny, innocent, streetwise telling of life on the street--all of the above describe Heather O'Neill's *Lullabies for Little Criminals*. In an autobiographical essay included in the book, O'Neill, whose own childhood parallels rather closely the life of Baby, her book's heroine, says, "In *Lullabies*, I wanted to capture what I remembered of the drunken babbling of unfortunate twelve-year-olds: their illusions; their ludicrously bad choices, their lack of morality and utter disbelief in cause and effect." She accomplishes all of the above and more.

Baby is born to two 15-year-olds, and her mother dies a year later. Her father, Jules, is not a bad man, but he is a perpetual kid, without money, education, purpose, moral compass, or any idea of what being a parent is about or how ordinary people live. When the novel begins, Baby is almost 12, and her 12th year turns out to be a very big one indeed. She smokes pot, shoots heroin, loses her virginity, and lives in foster homes, a state detention home, and one seedy, squalid apartment after another. She comes under the spell of Alphonse, a neighborhood pimp, and is so hungry for male affection that she mistakes what he offers for love and care.

Baby and her equally neglected and abused friends long for adulthood, whatever that means. They look up to sophisticated druggies and efficient thieves. Baby says, "I don't know why I was upset about not being an adult. It was right around the corner. Becoming a child again is what is impossible. That's what you have a legitimate reason to be upset over." Baby is matter-of-fact about her predicament. She knows that other kids have lives very different from hers but says, "It never occurs to you when you are very young to need something other than what your parents have to offer to you." This poignant story is beautifully written, sprinkled throughout with humor, pathos, unbelievable privation, and, in the end, the hope of redemption. At least we know that Heather O'Neill grew up to be a writer of no mean accomplishment. --Valerie Ryan

From Publishers Weekly

In her debut novel, *This American Life* contributor O'Neill offers a narrator, Baby, coming of age in Montreal just before her 12th birthday. Her mother is long dead. Her father, Jules, is a junkie who shuttles her from crumbling hotels to rotting apartments, his short-term work or moneymaking schemes always undermined by his rage and paranoia. Baby tries to screen out the bad parts by hanging out at the community center and in other kids' apartments, by focusing on school when she can and by taking mushrooms and the like. (She finds sex mostly painful.) Stints in foster care, family services and juvenile detention ("nostalgia could kill you there") usually end in Jules's return and his increasingly erratic behavior. Baby's intelligence and self-awareness can't protect her from parental and kid-on-kid violence, or from the seductive power of being desired by Alphonse, a charismatic predator, on the one hand, and by Xavier, an idealistic classmate, on the other. When her lives collide, Baby faces choices she is not equipped to make. O'Neill's vivid prose owes a debt to Donna Tartt's *The Little Friend*; the plot has a staccato feel that's appropriate but that doesn't coalesce. Baby's precocious introspection, however, feels pitch perfect, and the book's final pages are tear-jerkingly effective. (Oct.)

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From [Booklist](#)

Baby's mother is dead; her hapless father is a heroin addict; home is a series of tiny, increasingly squalid apartments in Montreal's seedier precincts; her boyfriend is a pimp; and--about the time she turns 13--she becomes a prostitute. Not exactly the stuff of Sweet Valley High--more like the worst of the teen problem novels of the 1970s--on steroids! And, yet, first-time-author O'Neill somehow infuses her troubling story

with a kind of heartbreaking innocence, thanks to her central conceit that Baby, her father (who was only 15 when she was born), and her friends are only pretending to be criminals to get by. The question of whether they will get by adds an element of suspense to this sad, almost wistful story, which occasionally strays dangerously close to sentimentality. O'Neill is a wonderful stylist, though, and the voice she has created for Baby is original and altogether captivating. *Michael Cart*

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

John Richey:

Have you spare time for a day? What do you do when you have more or little spare time? That's why, you can choose the suitable activity to get spend your time. Any person spent their own spare time to take a stroll, shopping, or went to the Mall. How about open or read a book entitled Lullabies for Little Criminals: A Novel? Maybe it is being best activity for you. You already know beside you can spend your time using your favorite's book, you can more intelligent than before. Do you agree with its opinion or you have various other opinion?

Margaret Hall:

Spent a free time for you to be fun activity to accomplish! A lot of people spent their free time with their family, or their own friends. Usually they accomplishing activity like watching television, going to beach, or picnic inside the park. They actually doing same thing every week. Do you feel it? Do you wish to something different to fill your own personal free time/ holiday? Can be reading a book is usually option to fill your cost-free time/ holiday. The first thing that you will ask may be what kinds of book that you should read. If you want to consider look for book, may be the guide untitled Lullabies for Little Criminals: A Novel can be very good book to read. May be it could be best activity to you.

Matthew Hood:

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Robert Murphy:

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