



Lullabies for Little Criminals: A Novel

By Heather O'Neill

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A new deluxe edition of the international bestseller by Heather O'Neill, the Giller-shortlisted author of *Daydreams of Angels* and *The Girl Who Was Saturday Night*, featuring an original foreword from the author, to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the coming-of-age story that *People* describes as “a vivid portrait of life on skid row.”

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 article. 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; he wants her body and soul—and what the johns don’t take he covets for himself. At the same time, a tender and naively passionate friendship unfolds with a boy from her class at school, who has no notion of the dark claims on her—which even her father, lost on the nod, cannot totally ignore. Jules consigns her to a stint in juvie hall, and for the moment this perceived betrayal preserves Baby from terrible harm—but after that, her salvation has to be her own invention.

Channeling the artlessly affecting voice of her thirteen-year-old heroine with extraordinary accuracy and power, Heather O’Neill’s heartbreakingly original debut novel blew readers away when it was first published ten years ago. Now in a new deluxe package it is 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.



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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 heartbreakingly innocent, 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:

Shanika Jeans:

The knowledge that you get from Lullabies for Little Criminals: A Novel is a more deep you digging the information that hide within the words the more you get enthusiastic about reading it. It does not mean that this book is hard to comprehend but Lullabies for Little Criminals: A Novel giving you joy feeling of reading. The article author conveys their point in selected way that can be understood by simply anyone who read the idea because the author of this reserve is well-known enough. This particular book also makes your own personal vocabulary increase well. That makes it easy to understand then can go along with you, both in printed or e-book style are available. We highly recommend you for having this specific Lullabies for Little Criminals: A Novel instantly.

David Carson:

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