



Lullabies for Little Criminals

By Heather O'Neill
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Introduction

Baby is thirteen, hovering between childhood and the temptations of the adult world. Motherless, she lives with her father, Jules, who takes better care of his heroin habit than he does of her. Yet Baby's got a genius for survival, spinning stories, cracking herself up, and slipping through an improvised life—until her unfurling beauty captures the attention of the charismatic Alphonse, with his string of sad girls who do his bidding. Finally, here is a danger that even the oblivious Jules cannot ignore. Baby comes at last to realize that the power to save herself rests in her hands alone.

Questions for Discussion

1. How would you characterize Jules's feelings about his daughter, Baby, and his behavior as a father?
2. How does the itinerant, impoverished life that Baby and Jules lead affect Baby's self-esteem and her sense of her place in the world?
3. How does the confessional quality of the first-person narrative of *Lullabies for Little Criminals* impact your appreciation and understanding of the hardships Baby experiences?
4. To what extent do you think Jules bears responsibility for Baby's increasingly risky behavior?
5. How do Baby's friendships with Linus Lucas, Theo, and Felix enable her to endure some of the difficulties of her childhood?
6. "Every good pimp is a mother." What does Alphonse represent to Baby, and why does she eventually agree to turn tricks for him?
7. Why does Baby ultimately decide to try heroin, the drug that has nearly destroyed her life because of her father's ongoing addiction to it?
8. To what extent is Baby's story in *Lullabies for Little Criminals* a tragedy?
9. After keeping silent for so long, why does Jules finally share information with Baby about her deceased mother, Manon Tremblay, and how do these details affect Baby?
10. What does the final scene of the novel in rural Val des Loups suggest about Baby's future?

About the Author

Heather O'Neill is a contributor to *This American Life*. She lives in Montreal, Canada. *Lullabies for Little Criminals* is her first novel.