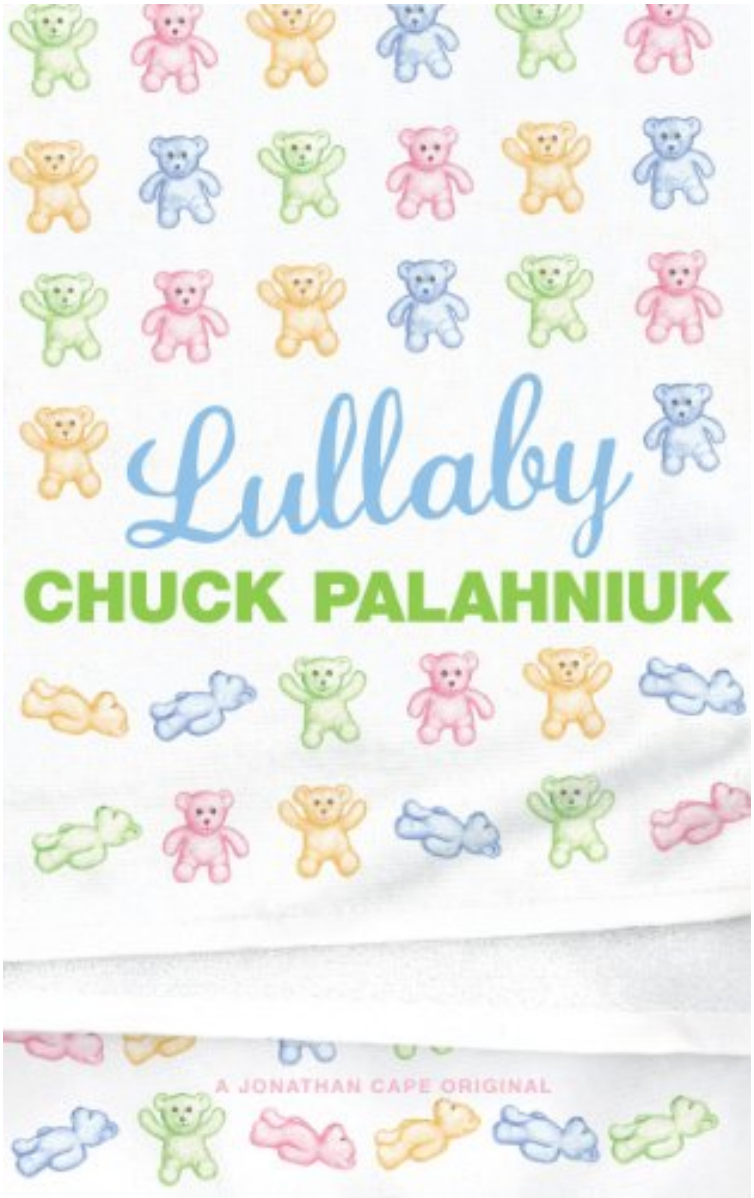
Lullaby



Par Chuck Palahniuk
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(Free read ebook) Lullaby

Par Chuck Palahniuk : Lullaby before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Lullaby:

Description : Description du produitFrom the author of the New York Times bestseller Choke and the cult classic Fight Club, a cunningly plotted novel about the ultimate verbal weapon, one that reinvents the apocalyptic thriller for our times.Carl Streator is a solitary widower and a fortyish newspaper reporter who is assigned to do a series of articles on Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. In the course of this investigation he discovers an ominous thread: the presence at the death scenes of the anthology Poems and Rhymes Around the World, all opened to the page where there appears an African chant, or culling song. This song turns out to be lethal when spoken or even thought in anyone's directionand once it lodges in Streator's brain he finds himself becoming an involuntary serial killer. So he teams up with a real estate broker, one Helen Hoover Boylewho specializes in selling haunted (or distressed) houses (wonderfully high turnover), and who lost a

child to the culling song years beforefor a cross-country odyssey to remove all copies of the book from libraries, lest this deadly verbal virus spread and wipe out human life. Accompanying them on this road trip are Helen's assistant, Mona Sabbat, an exquisitely earnest Wiccan, and her sardonic ecoterrorist boyfriend Oyster, who is running a scam involving fake liability claims and business blackmail. Welcome to the new nuclear family.On one level, Lullaby is a chillingly pertinent parable about the dangers of psychic infection and control in an era of wildly overproliferated information: Imagine a plague you catch through your ears . . . imagine an idea that occupies your mind like a city. But it is also a tightly wound thriller with an intriguing premise and a suspenseful plot full of surprising twists and turns. Finally, because it is a Chuck Palahniuk novel, it is a blackly comic tour de force that reinforces his stature as our funniest nihilist and a contemporary seer.

Prsentation de l'diteurCarl Streator is a reporter investigating Sudden Infant Death Syndrome for a soft-news feature. After responding to several calls with paramedics, he notices that all the dead children were read the same poem from the same library book the night before they died. It's a 'culling song' - an ancient African spell for euthanizing sick or old people. Researching it, he meets a woman who killed her own child with it accidentally. He himself accidentally killed his own wife and child with the same poem twenty years earlier. Together, the man and the woman must find and destroy all copies of this book, and try not to kill every rude sonofabitch that gets in their way. Lullaby is a comedy/drama/tragedy. In that order. It may also be Chuck Palahniuk's best book yet..comThe consequences of media saturation are the basis for an urban nightmare in Lullaby, Chuck Palahniuk's darkly comic and often dazzling thriller. Assigned to write a series of feature articles investigating SIDS, troubled newspaper reporter Carl Streator begins to notice a pattern among the cases he encounters: each child was read the same poem prior to his or her death. His research and a tip from a necrophilic paramedic lead him to Helen Hoover Boyle, a real estate agent who sells "distressed" (demonized) homes, assured of their instant turnover. Boyle and Streator have both lost children to "crib death," and she confirms Streator's suspicions: the poem is an ancient lullaby or "culling song" that is lethal if spoken--or even thought--in a victim's direction. The misanthropic Streator, now armed with a deadly and uncontrollably catchy tune, goes on a minor killing spree until he recognizes his crimes and the song's devastating potential. Lullaby then turns into something of a road trip narrative, with Streator, Boyle, her empty-headed Wiccan secretary Mona, and Mona's vigilante boyfriend Oyster setting out across the U.S. to track down and destroy all copies of the poem. In his previous works, including the cult favorite Fight Club, Palahniuk has demonstrated a fondness for making statements about the condition of humanity, and he uses Lullaby like a blunt object to repeatedly overstate his generally dim view. Such dogmatic venom undermines the persuasiveness of his thesis about mass communication and free will, but thankfully, Palahniuk offers some respite here by allowing for sympathy and love, as well as through his razor-sharp humor, such as his mock listings for Helen's possessed properties: "six bedrooms, four baths, pine-paneled entryway, and blood running down the kitchen walls...." At such moments, Lullaby casts a powerful spell. --Ross Doll ExtraitPrologueAt first, the new owner pretends he never looked at the living room floor. Never really looked. Not the first time they toured the house. Not when the inspector showed them through it. Theyd measured rooms and told the movers where to set the couch and piano, hauled in everything they owned, and never really stopped to look at the living room floor. They pretend. Then on the first morning they come downstairs, there it is, scratched in the white-oak floor:GET OUTSome new owners pretend a friend has done it as a joke. Others are sure its because they didnt tip the movers. A couple of nights later, a baby starts to cry from inside the north wall of the master bedroom.This is when they usually call. And this new owner on the phone is not what our hero, Helen Hoover Boyle, needs this morning. This stammering and whining. What she needs is a new cup of coffee and a seven-letter word for poultry. She needs to hear whats happening on the police scanner. Helen Boyle snaps her fingers until her secretary looks in from the outer office. Our hero wraps both hands around the mouthpiece and points the telephone receiver at the scanner, saying, Its a code nine-eleven. And her secretary, Mona, shrugs and says, So? So she needs to look it up in the codebook.And Mona says, Relax. Its a shoplifter.Murders, suicides, serial killers, accidental overdoses, you cant wait until this stuff is on the front page of the newspaper. You cant let another agent beat you to the next rainmaker.Helen needs the new owner at 325 Crestwood Terrace to shut up a minute. Of course, the message appeared in the living room floor. Whats odd is the baby doesnt usually start until the third night. First the phantom message, then the baby cries all night. If the owners last long enough, theyll be calling in another week about the face that appears, reflected in the water when you fill the bathtub. A wadded-up face

of wrinkles, the eyes hollowed-out dark holes.The third week brings the phantom shadows that circle around and around the dining room walls when everybody is seated at the table. There might be more events after that, but no-bodys lasted a fourth week.To the new owner, Helen Hoover Boyle says, Unless youre ready to go to court and prove the house is unlivable, unless you can prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that the previous owners knew this was happening ... She says, I have to tell you. She says, You lose a case like this, after you generate all this bad publicity, and that house will be worthless.Its not a bad house, 325 Crestwood Terrace, English Tudor, newer composition roof, four bedrooms, three and a half baths. An in-ground pool. Our hero doesnt even have to look at the fact sheet. Shes sold this house six times in the past two years. Another house, the New England saltbox on Eton Court, six bedrooms, four baths, pine-paneled entryway, and blood running down the kitchen walls, shes sold that house eight times in the past four years.To the new owner, she says, Got to put you on hold for a minute, and she hits the red button.Helen, shes wearing a white suit and shoes, but not snow white. Its more the white of downhill skiing in Banff with a private car and driver on call, fourteen pieces of matched luggage, and a suite at the Hotel Lake Louise.To the doorway, our hero says, Mona? Moonbeam? Louder, she says, Spirit-Girl?She drums her pen against the folded newspaper page on her desk and says, Whats a three-letter word for rodent?The police scanner gargles words, mumbles and barks, repeating Copy? after every line. Repeating Copy?Helen Boyle shouts, This coffee is not going to cut it.In another hour, she needs to be showing a Queen Anne, five bedrooms, with a mother-in-law apartment, two gas fireplaces, and the face of a barbiturate suicide that appears late at night in the powder room mirror. After that, theres a split-level ranch FAG heat, a sunken conversation pit, and the reoccurring phantom gunshots of a double homicide that happened over a decade ago. This is all in her thick daily planner, thick and bound in what looks like red leather. This is her record of everything. She takes another sip of coffee and says, What do you call this? Swiss Army mocha? Coffee is supposed to taste like coffee.Mona comes to the doorway with her arms folded across her front, and says, What?And Helen says, I need you to swing by--she shuffles some fact sheets on her blotter--swing by 4673 Willmont Place. Its a Dutch Colonial with a sunroom, four bedrooms, two baths, and an aggravated homicide.The police scanner says, Copy?Just do the usual, Helen says, and she writes the address on a note card and holds it out. Dont resolve anything. Dont burn any sage. Dont exorcise shit.Mona takes the note card and says, Just check it for vibes?Helen slashes the air with her hand and says, I dont want anybody going down any tunnels toward any bright light. I want these freaks staying right here, on this astral plane, thank you.She looks at her newspaper and says, They have all eternity to be dead. They can hang around in that house another fifty years and rattle some chains.Helen Hoover Boyle looks at the blinking hold light and says, What did you pick up at the six-bedroom Spanish yesterday?And Mona rolls her eyes at the ceiling. She pushes out her jaw and blows a big sigh, straight up to flop the hair on her forehead, and says, Theres a definite energy there. A subtle presence. But the floor plan is wonderful. A black silk cord loops around her neck and disappears into the corner of her mouth.And our hero says, Screw the floor plan.Forget those dream houses you only sell once every fifty years. Forget those happy homes. And screw subtle: cold spots, strange vapors, irritable pets. What she needed was blood running down the walls. She needed ice-cold invisible hands that pull children out of bed at night. She needed blazing red eyes in the dark at the foot of the basement stairs. That and decent curb appeal.The bungalow at 521 Elm Street, it has four bedrooms, original hardware, and screams in the attic.The French Normandy at 7645 Weston Heights has arched windows, a butlers pantry, leaded-glass pocket doors, and a body that appears in the upstairs hallway with multiple stab wounds.The ranch-style at 248 Levee Place--five bedrooms, four and a fact sheets on her blotter--"swing by 4673 Willmont Place. Its a half baths with a brick patio--it has the reappearing blood coughed up on the master bathroom walls after a drain cleaner poisoning.Distressed houses, Realtors call them. These houses that never sold because no one liked to show them. No Realtor wanted to host an open house there, risk spending any time there alone. Or these were the houses that sold and sold again every six months because no one could live there. A good string of these houses, twenty or thirty exclusives, and Helen could turn off the police scanner. She could quit searching the obituaries and the crime pages for suicides and homicides. She could stop sending Mona out to check on every possible lead. She could just kick back and find a five-letter word for equine.Plus I need you to pick up my cleaning, she says. And get some decent coffee. She points her pen at Mona and says, And out of respect for professionalism, leave the little Rasta doohickeys at home.Mona pulls the black silk cord until a quartz crystal pops out of her mouth, shining and wet. She blows on it, saying, Its a crystal. My boyfriend, Oyster, gave it to me.And Helen says, Youre dating a boy named Oyster?And Mona drops the crystal so it hangs against her chest and says, He says its for my own protection. The crystal soaks a darker

wet spot on her orange blouse.Oh, and before you go, Helen says, get me Bill or Emily Burrows on the phone.Helen presses the hold button and says, Sorry about that. She says there are a couple of clear options here. The new owner can move, just sign a quitclaim deed and the house becomes the banks problem.Or, our hero says, you give me a confidential exclusive to sell the house. What we call a vest-pocket listing.And maybe the new owner says no this time. But after that hideous face appears between his legs in the bathwater, after the shadows start marching around the walls, well, everyone says yes eventually.On the phone, the new owner says, And you wont tell any buyers about the problem?And Helen says, Dont even finish unpacking. Well just tell people youre in the process of moving out.If anybody asks, tell them youre being transferred out of town. Tell them you loved this house.She says, Everything else will just be our little secret.From the outer office, Mona says, I have Bill Burrows on line two.And the police scanner says, Copy?Our hero hits the next button and says, Bill!She mouths the word Coffee at Mona. She jerks her head toward the window and mouths, Go.The scanner says, Do you copy?This was Helen Hoover Boyle. Our hero. Now dead but not dead. Here was just another day in her life. This was the life she lived before I came along. Maybe this is a love story, maybe not. It depends on how much I can believe myself.This is about Helen Hoover Boyle. Her haunting me. The way a song stays in your head. The way you think life should be. How anything holds your attention. How your past goes with you into every day of your future.That is. This is. Its all of it, Helen Hoover Boyle.Were all of us haunted and haunting.On this, the last ordinary day of her regular life, our hero says into the phone, Bill Burrows? She says, You need to get Emily on the extension because Ive just found you two the perfect new home.She writes the word horse and says, Its my understanding that the sellers are very motivated.Chapter 1The problem with every story is you tell it after the fact.Even play-by-play description on the radio, the home runs and strikeouts, even that's delayed a few minutes. Even live television is postponed a couple seconds.Even sound and light can only go so fast.Another problem is the teller. The who, what, where, when, and why of the reporter. The media bias. How the messenger shapes the facts. What journalists call The Gatekeeper. How the presentation is everything.The story behind the story.Where I'm telling this from is one cafe after another. Where I'm writing this book, chapter by chapter, is never the same small town or city or truck stop in the middle of nowhere.What these places all have in common are miracles. You read about this stuff in the pulp tabloids, the kind of healings and sightings, the miracles, that never get reported in the mainstream press.This week, it's the Holy Virgin of Welburn, New Mexico. She came flying down Main Street last week. Her long red and black dreadlocks whipping behind her, her bare feet dirty, she wore an Indian cotton skirt printed in two shades of brown and a denim halter top. It's all in this week's World Miracles Report, next to the cashier in every supermarket in America.And here I am, a week late. Always one step behind. After the fact.The Flying Virgin had fingernails painted bright pink with white tips. A French manicure, some witnesses call it. The Flying Virgin used a can of Bug-Off brand insect fogger, and across the blue New Mexican sky, she wrote:STOP HAVING BABYS(Sic)The can of Bug-Off, she dropped. It's right now headed for the Vatican. For analysis. Right now, you can buy postcards of the event. Videos even.Almost everything you can buy is after the fact. Caught. Dead. Cooked.In the souvenir videos, the Flying Virgin shakes the can of fogger. Floating above one end of Main Street, she waves at the crowd. And there's a bush of brown hair under her arm. The moment before she starts writing, a gust of wind lifts her skirt, and the Flying Virgin's not wearing any panties. Between her legs, she's shaved.This is where I'm writing this story from today. Here in a roadside diner, talking to witnesses in Welburn, New Mexico. Here with me is Sarge, a baked potato of an old Irish cop. On the table between us is the local newspaper, folded to show a three-column ad that says:Attention Patrons of All Plush InteriorsFurniture StoresThe ad says, "If poisonous spiders have hatched from your new upholstered furniture, you may be eligible to take part in a class-action lawsuit." And the ad gives a phone number you could call, but it's no use.The Sarge has the kind of loose neck skin that if you pinch it, when you let go the skin stays pinched. He has to go find a mirror and rub the skin to make it go flat.Outside the diner, people are still driving into town. People kneel and pray for another visitation. The Sarge puts his big mitts together and pretends to pray, his eyes rolled sideways to look out the window, his holster unsnapped, his pistol loaded and ready for skeet shooting.After she was done skywriting, the Flying Virgin blew kisses to people. She flashed a two-finger peace sign. She hovered just above the trees, clutching her skirt closed with one fist, and she shook her red and black dreadlocks back and waved, and Amen. She was gone, behind the mountains, over the horizon. Gone.Still, you can't trust everything you read in the newspaper.The Flying Madonna, it wasn't a miracle.It was magic.These aren't saints. They're spells.The Sarge and me, we're not here to witness anything. We're witch-hunters.Still, this isn't a story about

here and now. Me, the Sarge, the Flying Virgin. Helen Hoover Boyle. What I'm writing is the story of how we met. How we got here.Chapter 2They ask you just one question. Just before you graduate from journalism school, they tell you to imagine you're a reporter. Imagine you work at a daily big-city newspaper, and one Christmas Eve, your editor sends you out to investigate a death.The police and paramedics are there. The neighbors, wearing bathrobes and slippers, crowd the hallway of the slummy tenement. Inside the apartment, a young couple is sobbing beside their Christmas tree. Their baby has choked to death on an ornament. You get what you need, the baby's name and age and all, and you get back to the newspaper around midnight and write the story on press deadline.You submit it to your editor and he rejects it because you don't say the color of the ornament. Was it red or green? You couldn't look, and you didn't think to ask.With the pressroom screaming for the front page, your choices are:Call the parents and ask the color.Or refuse to call and lose your job.This was the fourth estate. Journalism. And where I went to school, just this one question is the entire final exam for the Ethics course. It's an either/or question. My answer was to call the paramedics. Items like this have to be catalogued. The ornament had to be bagged and photographed in some file of evidence. No way would I call the parents after midnight on Christmas Eve.The school gave my ethics a D.Instead of ethics, I learned only to tell people what they want to hear. I learned to write everything down. And I learned editors can be real assholes.Since then, I still wonder what that test was really about. I'm a reporter now, on a big-city daily, and I don't have to imagine anything.My first real baby was on a Monday morning in September. There was no Christmas ornament. No neighbors crowded around the trailer house in the suburbs. One paramedic sat with the parents in the kitchenette and asked them the standard questions. The second paramedic took me back to the nursery and showed me what they usually find in the crib.The standard questions paramedics ask include: Who found the child dead? When was the child found? Was the child moved? When was the child last seen alive? Was the child breast- or bottle-fed? The questions seem random, but all doctors can do is gather statistics and hope someday a pattern will emerge.The nursery was yellow with blue, flowered curtains at the windows and a white wicker chest of drawers next to the crib. There was a white-painted rocking chair. Above the crib was a mobile of yellow plastic butterflies. On the wicker chest was a book open to page 27. On the floor was a blue braided-rag rug. On one wall was a framed needlepoint. It said: Thursday's Child Has Far to Go. The room smelled like baby powder.And maybe I didn't learn ethics, but I learned to pay attention. No detail is too minor to note.The open book was called Poems and Rhymes from Around the World, and it was checked out from the county library.My editor's plan was to do a five-part series on sudden infant death syndrome. Every year seven thousand babies die without any apparent cause. Two out of every thousand babies will just go to sleep and never wake up. My editor, Duncan, he kept calling it crib death.The details about Duncan are he's pocked with acne scars and his scalp is brown along the hairline every two weeks when he dyes his gray roots. His computer password is "password."All we know about sudden infant death is there is no pattern. Most babies die alone between midnight and morning, but a baby will also die while sleeping beside its parents. It can die in a car seat or in a stroller. A baby can die in its mother's arms.There are so many people with infants, my editor said. It's the type of story that every parent and grandparent is too afraid to read and too afraid not to read. There's really no new information, but the idea was to profile five families that had lost a child. Show how people cope. How people move forward with their lives. Here and there, we could salt in the standard facts about crib death. We could show the deep inner well of strength and compassion each of these people discovers. That angle. Because it ties to no specific event, it's what you'd call soft news. We'd run it on the front of the Lifestyles section.For art, we could show smiling pictures of healthy babies that were now dead.We'd show how this could happen to anyone.That was his pitch. It's the kind of investigative piece you do for awards. It was late summer and the news was slow. This was the peak time of year for last-term pregnancies and newborns.It was my editor's idea for me to tag along with paramedics.The Christmas story, the sobbing couple, the ornament, by now I'd been working so long I'd forgotten all that junk.That hypothetical ethics question, they have to ask that at the end of the journalism program because by then it's too late. You have big student loans to pay off. Years and years later, I think what they're really asking is: Is this something you want to do for a living?Chapter 3The muffled thunder of dialogue comes through the walls, then a chorus of laughter. Then more thunder. Most of the laugh tracks on television were recorded in the early 1950s. These days, most of the people you hear laughing are dead.The stomp and stomp and stomp of a drum comes down through the ceiling. The rhythm changes. Maybe the beat crowds together, faster, or it spreads out, slower, but it doesn't stop.Up through the floor, someone's barking the words to a song. These people who need their television or stereo or radio playing all the time. These people

so scared of silence. These are my neighbors. These sound-oholics. These quiet-ophobics.Laughter of the dead comes through every wall.These days, this is what passes for home sweet home.This siege of noise.After work, I made one stop. The man standing behind the cash register looked up when I limped into the store. Still looking at me, he reached under the counter and brought out something in brown paper, saying, "Double-bagged. I think you'll like this one." He set it on the counter and patted it with one hand.The package is half the size of a shoe box. It weighs less than a can of tuna.He pressed one, two, three buttons on the register, and the price window said a hundred and forty-nine dollars. He told me, "Just so you won't worry, I taped the bags shut tight."In case it rains, he put the package in a plastic bag, and said, "You let me know if there's any of it not there." He said, "You don't walk like that foot is getting better."All the way home, the package rattled. Under my arm, the brown paper slid and wrinkled. With my every limp, what's inside clattered from one end of the box to the other.At my apartment, the ceiling is pounding with some fast music. The walls are murmuring with panicked voices. Either an ancient cursed Egyptian mummy has come back to life and is trying to kill the people next door, or they're watching a movie.Under the floor, there's someone shouting, a dog barking, doors slamming, the auctioneer call of some song.In the bathroom, I turn out the lights. So I can't see what's in the bag. So I won't know how it's supposed to turn out. In the cramped tight darkness, I stuff a towel in the crack under the door. With the package on my lap, I sit on the toilet and listen.This is what passes for civilization.People who would never throw litter from their car will drive past you with their radio blaring. People who'd never blow cigar smoke at you in a crowded restaurant will bellow into their cell phone. They'll shout at each other across the space of a dinner plate.These people who would never spray herbicides or insecticides will fog the neighborhood with their stereo playing Scottish bagpipe music. Chinese opera. Country and western.Outdoors, a bird singing is fine. Patsy Cline is not.Outdoors, the din of traffic is bad enough. Adding Chopin's Piano Concerto in E Minor is not making the situation any better.You turn up your music to hide the noise. Other people turn up their music to hide yours. You turn up yours again. Everyone buys a bigger stereo system. This is the arms race of sound. You don't win with a lot of treble.This isn't about quality. It's about volume.This isn't about music. This is about winning.You stomp the competition with the bass line. You rattle windows. You drop the melody line and shout the lyrics. You put in foul language and come down hard on each cussword.You dominate. This is really about power.In the dark bathroom, sitting on the toilet, I fingernail the tape open at one end of the package, and what's inside is a square cardboard box, smooth, soft, and furred at the edges, each corner blunt and crushed in. The top lifts off, and what's inside feels like layers of sharp, hard complicated shapes, tiny angles, curves, corners, and points. These I set to one side on the bathroom floor, in the dark. The cardboard box, I put back inside the paper bags. Between the hard, tangled shapes are two sheets of slippery paper. These papers, I put in the bags, too. The bags, I crush and roll and twist into a ball.All of this I do blind, touching the smooth paper, feeling the layers of hard, branching shapes.The floor under my shoes, even the toilet seat, shakes a little from the music next door.Each family with a crib death, you want to tell them to take up a hobby. You'd be surprised just how fast you can close the door on your past. No matter how bad things get, you can still walk away. Learn needlepoint. Make a stained-glass lamp.I carry the shapes to the kitchen, and in the light they're blue and gray and white. They're brittle-hard plastic. Just tiny shards. Tiny shingles and shutters and bargeboards. Tiny steps and columns and window frames. If it's a house or a hospital, you can't tell. There are little brick walls and little doors. Spread out on the kitchen table, it could be the parts of a school or a church. Without seeing the picture on the box, without the instruction sheets, the tiny gutters and dormers might be for a train station or a lunatic asylum. A factory or a prison.No matter how you put it together, youre never sure if its right.The little pieces, the cupolas and chimneys, they twitch with each beat of noise coming through the floor.These music-oholics. These calm-ophobics.No one wants to admit were addicted to music. Thats just not possible. No ones addicted to music and television and radio. We just need more of it, more channels, a larger screen, more volume. We cant bear to be without it, but no, nobodys addicted.We could turn it off anytime we wanted.I fit a window frame into a brick wall. With a little brush, the size for fingernail polish, I glue it. The window is the size of a fingernail. The glue smells like hair spray. The smell tastes like oranges and gasoline.The pattern of the bricks on the wall is as fine as your fingerprint. Another window fits in place, and I brush on more glue.The sound shivers through the walls, through the table, through the window frame, and into my finger.These distraction-oholics. These focus-ophobics. Old George Orwell got it backward.Big Brother isnt watching. Hes singing and dancing. Hes pulling rabbits out of a hat. Big Brothers busy holding your attention every moment youre awake. Hes making sure youre always distracted. Hes making sure youre fully absorbed.Hes making sure your

imagination withers. Until its as useful as your appendix. Hes making sure your attention is always filled.And this being fed, its worse than being watched. With the world always filling you, no one has to worry about whats in your mind. With everyones imagination atrophied, no one will ever be a threat to the world.I finger open a button on my white shirt and stuff my tie inside. With my chin tucked down tight against the knot of my tie, I tweezer a tiny pane of glass into each window. Using a razor blade, I cut plastic curtains smaller than a postage stamp, blue curtains for the upstairs, yellow for the downstairs. Some curtains left open, some drawn shut, I glue them down.There are worse things than finding your wife and child dead.You can watch the world do it. You can watch your wife get old and bored. You can watch your kids discover everything in the world youve tried to save them from. Drugs, divorce, conformity, disease. All the nice clean books, music, television. Distraction. These people with a dead child, you want to tell them, go ahead. Blame yourself.There are worse things you can do to the people you love than kill them. The regular way is just to watch the world do it. Just read the newspaper.The music and laughter eat away at your thoughts. The noise blots them out. All the sound distracts. Your head aches from the glue.Anymore, no ones mind is their own. You cant concentrate.You cant think. Theres always some noise worming in. Singers shouting. Dead people laughing. Actors crying. All these little doses of emotion.Someones always spraying the air with their mood.Their car stereo, broadcasting their grief or joy or anger all over the neighborhood.One Dutch Colonial mansion, I installed fifty-six windows upside down and had to throw it out. One twelve-bedroom Tudor castle, I glued the downspouts on the wrong gable ends andmelted everything by trying to fix it with a chemical solvent.This isnt anything new.Experts in ancient Greek culture say that people back then didnt see their thoughts as belonging to them. When ancient Greeks had a thought, it occurred to them as a god or goddess giving an order. Apollo was telling them to be brave. Athena was telling them to fall in love.Now people hear a commercial for sour cream potato chips and rush out to buy, but now they call this free will.At least the ancient Greeks were being honest.The truth is, even if you read to your wife and child some night. You read them a lullaby. And the next morning, you wake up but your family doesnt. You lie in bed, still curled against your wife. Shes still warm but not breathing. Your daughters not crying.The house is already hectic with traffic and talk radio and steam pounding through the pipes inside the wall. The truth is, you can forget even that day for the moment it takes to make aperfect knot in your tie.This I know. This is my life.You might move away, but thats not enough. Youll take up a hobby. Youll bury yourself in work. Change your name. Youll cobble things together. Make order out of chaos. Youll do this each time your foot is healed enough, and you have the money.Organize every detail.This isnt what a therapist will tell you to do, but it works.You glue the doors into the walls next. You glue the walls into the foundation. You tweezer together the tiny bits of each chimney and let the glue dry while you build the roof. You hang the tiny gutters. Every detail exact. You set the tiny dormers. Hang the shutters. Frame the porch. Seed the lawn. Plant the trees.Inhale the taste of oranges and gasoline. The smell of hair spray. Lose yourself in each complication. Glue a thread of ivy up one side of the chimney. Your fingers webbed with threads of glue, your fingertips crusted and sticking together.You tell yourself that noise is what defines silence. Without noise, silence would not be golden. Noise is the exception. Think of deep outer space, the incredible cold and quiet where your wife and kid wait. Silence, not heaven, would be reward enough.With tweezers, you plant flowers along the foundation.Your back and neck curve forward over the table. With your ass clenched, your spines hunched, arching up to a headache at the base of your skull.You glue the tiny Welcome mat outside the front door. You hook up the tiny lights inside. You glue the mailbox beside the front door. You glue the tiny, tiny milk bottles on the front porch.The tiny folded newspaper.With everything perfect, exact, meticulous, it must be three or four in the morning, because by now its quiet. The floor, the ceiling, the walls, are still. The compressor on the refrigerator shuts off, and you can hear the filament buzzing in each lightbulb. You can hear my watch tick. A moth knocks against the kitchen window.You can see your breath, the room is that cold.You put the batteries in place and flip a little switch, and the tiny windows glow. You set the house on the floor and turn out the kitchen light.Stand over the house in the dark. From this far away it looks perfect. Perfect and safe and happy. A neat red-brick home. The tiny windows of light shine out on the lawn and trees. The curtains glow, yellow in the babys room. Blue in your own bedroom.The trick to forgetting the big picture is to look at everything close-up.The shortcut to closing a door is to bury yourself in the details.This is how we must look to God.As if everythings just fine.Now take off your shoe, and with your bare foot, stomp. Stomp and keep stomping. No matter how much it hurts, the brittle broken plastic and wood and glass, keep stomping until the downstairs

neighbor pounds the ceiling with his fist.From the Hardcover edition.