



## Silence Once Begun: A Novel (Vintage Contemporaries)

By Jesse Ball

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Over the course of several months, eight people vanish from their homes in the same Japanese town, a single playing card found on each door. Known as “the Narito Disappearances,” the crime has authorities baffled—until a confession appears on the police’s doorstep, signed by one Oda Sotatsu, a thread salesman.

Sotatsu is arrested, jailed, and interrogated, but he refuses to speak. Even as his family comes to visit, even as his execution looms, and even as a young woman named Jito Joo enters his cell, he maintains his vow of silence. And as a journalist’s obsession uncovers more to the story, Jesse Ball spins a wildly inventive and emotionally powerful take of unjust conviction and lost love.

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## Silence Once Begun: A Novel (Vintage Contemporaries) By Jesse Ball Bibliography

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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

The enigmatic silence of a wrongfully accused suspect is at the core of the new novel from Ball (*The Curfew*). In 1977 Japan, Oda Sotatsu is a mild-mannered thread salesman who falls in with a couple of wild characters—the charismatic Sato Kakuzo and the beautiful Jito Joo. After losing a wager to Kakuzo, Oda signs a document claiming responsibility for a series of mysterious disappearances that have baffled authorities in the region. Later, while on trial and in prison, rather than profess his innocence or defend himself, Oda stops speaking. Years later, a journalist, also named Jesse Ball, becomes fascinated with the case and attempts to track down and interview Oda's family and friends. Most of the novel is written as transcripts of these interviews, which layer together, Rashomon-like, to form an increasingly mysterious and conflicted portrait of Oda and his alleged crime. This methodical presentation makes for coolly suspenseful reading, but it's soon clear there is more underlying Ball's investigation than meets the eye. For example, when he tracks down Joo, the normally dispassionate interviewer is overcome with emotion and makes a lengthy and unexpected personal confession. Even so, the truth remains elusive until the final pages. The novel is intriguing and offers a riveting portrait of the Japanese criminal justice system (a guard's description of the execution procedure is particularly chilling); but how readers react to it will largely depend on whether they feel some of the final twists deepen or cheapen the material. (Jan.)

From [Booklist](#)

Ball is alarmed, entranced, haunted, and enlightened by silence. A key element in his previous novel, *The Curfew* (2011), it plays a more harrowing role in this meditative investigation into a tragedy of injustice. After his beloved wife suddenly turns silent, a writer named Jesse Ball becomes obsessed with a 1977 criminal case in Japan involving the disappearance of 11 villagers. A confession signed by Oda Sotatsu, a quiet, dutifully employed 29-year-old man, was delivered to the police station. Sotatsu was arrested and incarcerated and soon stopped speaking. He remained silent during his trial and was promptly executed. Three decades later, Ball travels to Japan to interview Sotatsu's family and find the mystery woman who often visited the doomed man. Ball's spare, meditative, Rashomon-like novel, a work of exceptional control and exquisite nuance, consists of contradictory transcripts, poetic letters, a striking fable, and melancholy musings. Enigmatic black-and-white photographs add to the subtly cinematic mode. With echoes of Franz Kafka, Paul Auster, and Kobo Abe, Ball creates an elegantly chilling and provocatively metaphysical tale. -- Donna Seaman

Review

#### **A *New York Times* Book Review Editors' Choice**

“As in Kafka’s *The Trial*, the justice of *Silence Once Begun* is both tragic and absurd.... Genuinely surprising. . . . An accomplishment.” —*Los Angeles Times*

“Absorbing, finely wrought. . . . Causes a reader to go carefully, not wanting to miss a word.” —Helen Oyeyemi, *The New York Times Book Review*

“*Rashomon*-like. . . . A graceful and multifaceted fable on the nature of truth and identity.” —Sam Sacks, *The Wall Street Journal*

“Beguiling. . . . Ball enjoys borrowing some of the conventions of crime writing but in order to use them

rather than to be used by them. . . . Appealingly funny.” —James Wood, *The New Yorker*

“The closest contemporary American writer we have to Italo Calvino in ear and mind.” —*Interview*

“One of the triumphs of *Silence Once Begun* is the way that Ball enriches his metafictional restlessness with [a] humane curiosity . . . The language seems aware of the charged space around it, as if one were praying aloud in a darkened, empty church.” —James Wood, *The New Yorker*

“Remarkable. . . . A perfection of [Ball’s] style . . . realism distilled to its barest essentials.” —*The New York Observer*

“A great page-turner. . . . Think Camus’s *The Stranger*, but with bonus material, like interviews from some of Meursault’s closest confidants. Or think Kafka—only a version where the agents of power will pull up a chair and tell you exactly what was at stake in the trial. . . . [A] daring and beautiful little book.” —*The Chicago Reader*

“*Silence Once Begun* kept me up two nights running. It felt more real than the news and most documentaries and memoirs. Once again, Ball has extended the reach of the novel—of the love story, even—into menacing, freaky new places.” —James McManus, author of *Positively Fifth Street*

“Daring. . . . *Silence Once Begun* is a wondrous and provocatively strange reading experience that places Jesse Ball among our most compelling and daring writers today.” —*The Los Angeles Review of Books*

“*Silence Once Begun* expands the meditative, eerie ground [Ball]’s already established. . . . An extremely refreshing presence in American writing, and one that provides more than it requires.” —*Vice*

“*Silence Once Begun* creates and maintains an atmosphere of mystery and melancholy like no other. . . . Lyrical and heartfelt.” —*Bookslut*

“I can think of only a handful of mystery novels that have used intrigue and suspense as efficiently in the first hundred pages.” —*Full Stop*

“With echoes of Franz Kafka, Paul Auster, and Kobo Abe, Ball creates an elegantly chilling and provocatively metaphysical tale.” —*Booklist*

“Ball’s calculated use of silence is masterful, and the novel haunts us, like any unsolved crime.” —*BookPage*

“A wonderful, chaotic, engrossing exploration of what drives people to do what they do and how lives intersect.” —*The Wichita Eagle*

“Haunting and original, Ball succeeds in re-imagining what a novel can be.” —*Cedar Rapids Gazette*

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Tim Walton:**

Often the book *Silence Once Begun: A Novel* (Vintage Contemporaries) will bring someone to the new experience of reading the book. The author style to explain the idea is very unique. In the event you try to find new book to learn, this book very appropriate to you. The book *Silence Once Begun: A Novel* (Vintage Contemporaries) is much recommended to you to see. You can also get the e-book through the official web site, so you can easier to read the book.

#### **Virginia Gauvin:**

Spent a free time for you to be fun activity to try and do! A lot of people spent their sparetime with their family, or all their friends. Usually they undertaking activity like watching television, about to beach, or picnic within the park. They actually doing ditto every week. Do you feel it? Do you wish to something different to fill your own personal free time/ holiday? May be reading a book might be option to fill your free time/ holiday. The first thing you will ask may be what kinds of reserve that you should read. If you want to consider look for book, may be the publication untitled *Silence Once Begun: A Novel* (Vintage Contemporaries) can be great book to read. May be it is usually best activity to you.

#### **Robert Burmeister:**

*Silence Once Begun: A Novel* (Vintage Contemporaries) can be one of your nice books that are good idea. Many of us recommend that straight away because this book has good vocabulary that can increase your knowledge in terminology, easy to understand, bit entertaining but nonetheless delivering the information. The writer giving his/her effort to put every word into delight arrangement in writing *Silence Once Begun: A Novel* (Vintage Contemporaries) nevertheless doesn't forget the main stage, giving the reader the hottest and also based confirm resource information that maybe you can be considered one of it. This great information can easily drawn you into completely new stage of crucial pondering.

#### **Mamie Donnelly:**

Don't be worry for anyone who is afraid that this book can filled the space in your house, you can have it in e-book approach, more simple and reachable. That *Silence Once Begun: A Novel* (Vintage Contemporaries) can give you a lot of friends because by you looking at this one book you have point that they don't and make an individual more like an interesting person. This particular book can be one of a step for you to get success. This book offer you information that perhaps your friend doesn't recognize, by knowing more than other make you to be great men and women. So , why hesitate? Let me have *Silence Once Begun: A Novel* (Vintage Contemporaries).

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