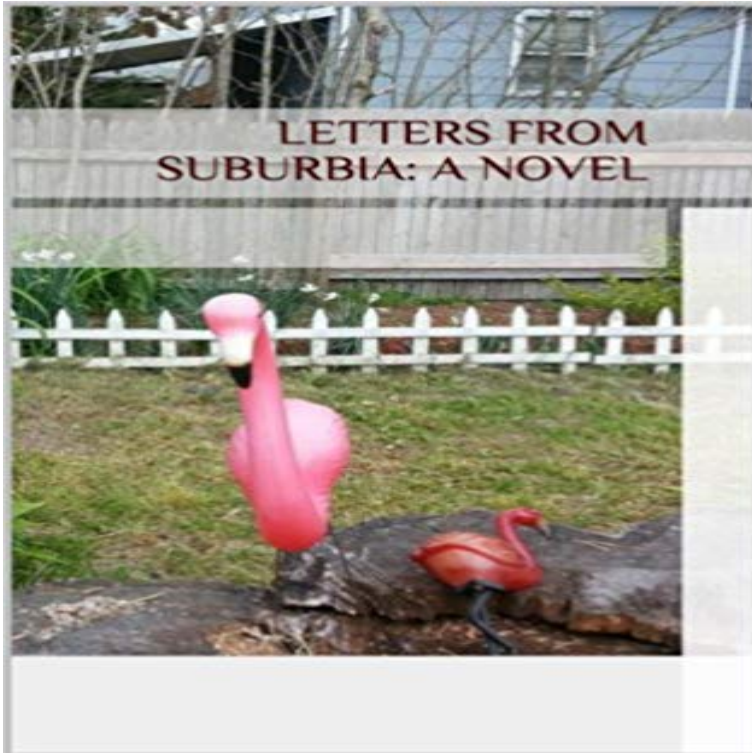


Letters from Suburbia



Cut loose by a fiancée who paid half his rent, Bill, the narrator, is forced to return to suburbia, where he grew up and where a host of comic encounters await. These encounters begin at 8 a. m. his first morning back, when he is roused from sleep by the whiny roar of a neighbors lawnmower. The lawnmower belongs to Walter, the first of Bills many suburban acquaintances whose beliefs, words, and habits amaze and exasperate him. These acquaintances also include the ONeals, a middle-aged couple who have booby-trapped every inch of their house and yard for fear of prowlers; Mrs. Schenk, a voyeuristic elderly painter, who, along with her cats, menaces Bill from across the driveway; Cassio, a harried, well-armed mailman; Popaloukanopoulos, an angry restaurateur/poet; Arnold, a zen coffeemeister; Megan, a married, fashionably maternal object of Bills desires; Ivan, an eavesdropping stoner high school buddy; and Ida and Matteo, the inflatable dolphins in his mothers swimming pool. And then there is Bills family: the sister, mother, and absent father who test his patience with their several versions of boredom and loneliness. Mrs. Giudice, the mother, seeks solace in all forms of shopping. Delores, the teenaged sister, believes in very little and pays full attention only to afternoon t. v. talk shows. Sal, the father who lives in memory as a selfish mans man seeking the fame suburbia denies, calling occasionally from California to update his children on his imaginary career. Bill struggles to understand them all, and to bear a life filled with monolithic shopping clubs, mechanical Santas, local poetry readings, rigid health club rituals, watered-down gangsta culture, styrofoam deer, outlandish wedding banquets, pre-fab polystyrene indoor playgrounds, vinyl siding, unnaturally green lawns, caged chinchillas, hairy neon refrigerator magnets, late-night

phone conversations with strangers, and a neglected moon. We read Bills letters, as he moves slowly toward escape or insanity, his hopes lying with hope for his neighbors, with distant friends, and with his sense of bleak humor. This novel in vignettes has a great deal to say about life in the suburbs, family life generally, and about the many forms frustration and aspiration can assume.

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