

"Beautifully detailed, viscerally frightening, and deep with emotional resonance."

—DAN CHAON, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Ill Will*

BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *THE CABIN AT THE END OF THE WORLD*

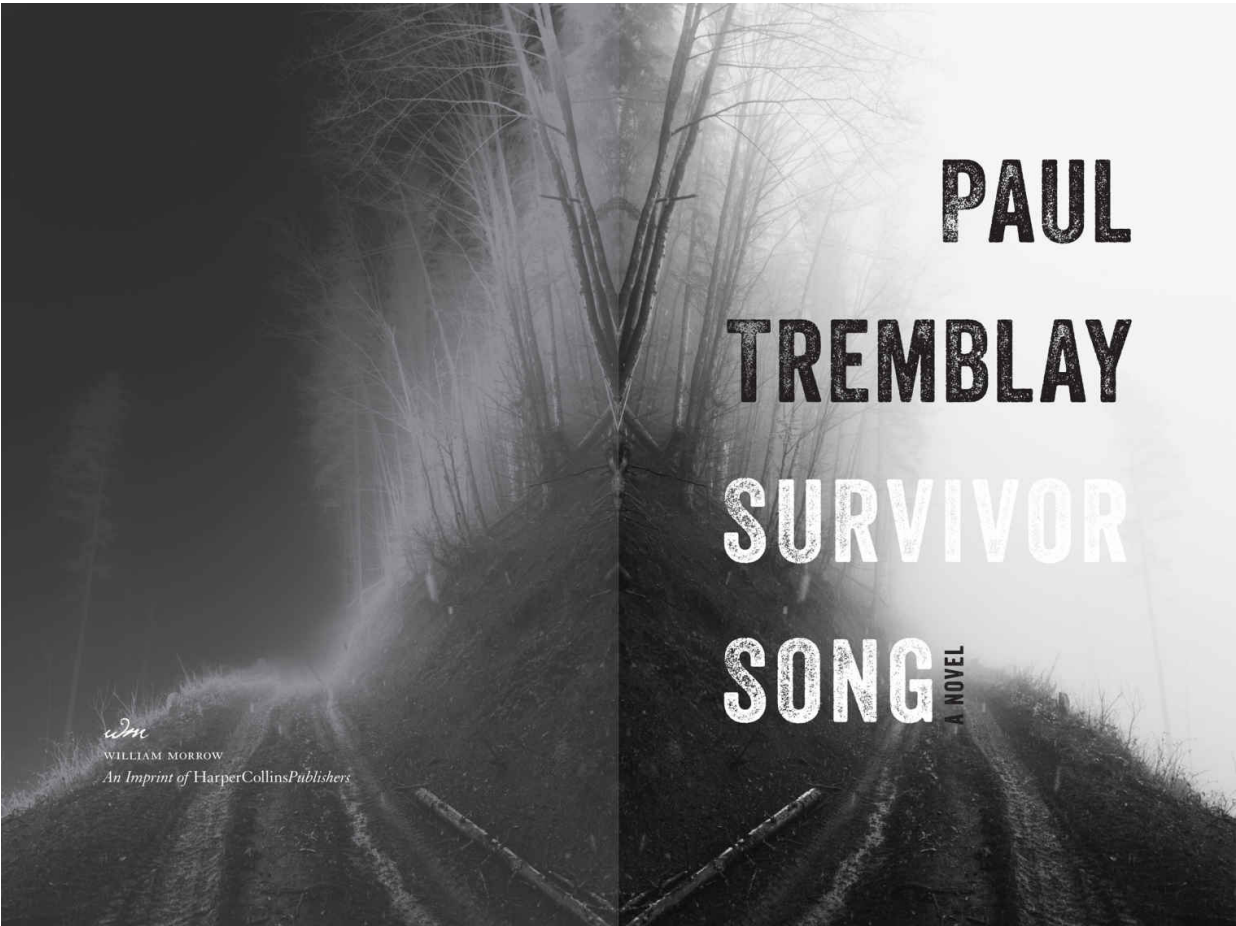
# PAUL TREMBLAY

# SURVIVOR

# SONG

A NOVEL





**PAUL  
TREMBLAY  
SURVIVOR  
SONG** A NOVEL

*wm*  
WILLIAM MORROW  
*An Imprint of HarperCollins Publishers*

# Dedication

FOR LISA, COLE, AND EMMA

# Epigraph

*It's awful and still probably worse  
They're biters and rarely alone  
And rarely alone.*

—Big Business, “Heal the Weak”

## **Author's Note for the Reader:**

When you encounter wide blank spaces and pages, fear not, they are purposeful. Okay, maybe fear a little . . .

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*Acknowledgments*  
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## Prelude



# In Olden Times, When Wishing Still Helped



**This is not** a fairy tale. Certainly it is not one that has been sanitized, homogenized, or Disneyfied, bloodless in every possible sense of the word, beasts and human monsters defanged and claws clipped, the children safe and the children saved, the hard truths harvested from hard lives if not lost then obscured, and purposefully so.

\* \* \*

Last night there was confusion as to whether turning off the lights was a recommendation or if it was a requirement in accordance with the government-mandated curfew. After her husband, Paul, was asleep, Natalie relied on her cell phone's flashlight in the

bathroom as a guide instead of lighting a candle. She has been getting clumsier by the day and didn't trust herself to casually carry fire through the house.

It's quarter past 11 A.M., and yes, she is in the bathroom again. Before Paul left three hours ago, she joked she should set up a cot and an office in here. Its first-floor window overlooks the semi-private backyard and the sun-bleached, needs-a-coat-of-stain picket fence. The grass is dead, having months prior surrendered to the withering heat of yet another record-breaking summer.

The heat will be blamed for the outbreak. There will be scores of other villains, some heroes too. It will be years before the virus's full phylogenetic tree is mapped, and even then, there will continue to be doubters, naysayers, and the most cynical political opportunists. The truth will go unheeded by some, as it invariably does.

To wit, Natalie can't stop reading the fourteen-day-old Facebook post on her town's "Stoughton Enthusiasts" page. There are currently 2,312 comments. Natalie has read them all.

The post: Wildlife Services is informing the public that rabies vaccine baits are being dropped in the MA area in coordination with the Department of Agriculture. Baits are also being dropped in targeted areas of surrounding states RI, CT, NH, VT, ME, NY, and as a precaution PA. The vaccine is in a blister pack, army-green. Baits will be dropped by airplane and helicopter until further notice. If you see or find a bait, please do not disturb it. Not harmful but not for human consumption.

The photo: The size of a dollar coin, the top of the bait pack is rectangular, has a puttylike appearance, and the middle leavened like a loaf of bread. It looks like a green, bite-size Almond Joy.

[Natalie and Paul have already stress-eaten most of the large variety bag of Halloween candy and it's only October 21.]

The back of the bait pack has a warning label:

MNR 1-888-555-6655

Rabies Vaccine DO NOT EAT Live adenovirus vector

Vaccin antirabique NE PAS MANGER Vecteur vivant d'adénovirus

MNR 1-888-555-6655

## A small sample of the unedited comments to the Facebook post, in chronological order:

What if an animal eats like twenty of these?

This sounds really dumb. There has to be a better way.

Vaccinating as many animals within a population is the only proven way to stop the spread. You can't get ALL animals to voluntarily walk up to the vet for vaccinations. Seriously, the fact that we have effective baits to drop is huge and better than doing nothing.

What if a child eats it? This can't be okay.

That's why there's the warning. And I doubt they're dropping this stuff in the backyards. Only in the woods.

They say its some weird scary new strain.

A rabid animal is more dangerous than eating a vaccine.

Vaccines is what makes you sick. Everyone knows that.

I live in a wooded area and I have cats and grandkids. I don't want them dropping that shit near me.

I ate four baits and now my erection is HUGE and GREEN and it won't go away.

HULK SMASH!!!!

This isnt rabies. This is something knew.

I'm hearing you don't even have to get bit to get it.

They don't know.

Regular rabies is slow, usually takes weeks. They're saying this thing moves through you in minutes.

42 confirmed human cases in Brockton. 29 in Stoughton. 19 in Ames.

Where are you hearing this?

What are the symptoms???

Headache and flu-like symptoms but it gets soooo much worse and you go crazy and you get weird and violent and you attack people and you're fucked and everyone is fucked because there is no cure.