



The Good Neighbor

A.J. Banner

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From a phenomenal new voice in suspense fiction comes a book that will forever change the way you look at the people closest to you...

Shadow Cove, Washington, is the kind of town everyone dreams about—quaint streets, lush forests, good neighbors. That’s what Sarah thinks as she settles into life with her new husband, Dr. Johnny McDonald. But all too soon she discovers an undercurrent of deception. And one October evening when Johnny is away, sudden tragedy destroys Sarah’s happiness.

Dazed and stricken with grief, she and Johnny begin to rebuild their shattered lives. As she picks up the pieces of her broken home, Sarah discovers a shocking secret that forces her to doubt everything she thought was true—about her neighbors, her friends, and even her marriage. With each stunning revelation, Sarah must ask herself, *Can we ever really know the ones we love?*

The Good Neighbor Details

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From Reader Review The Good Neighbor for online ebook

Brenda says

This was okay. Nothing too thrilling or tense. I think it was a bit formulaic. Wife starts to doubt husband, break up, make up. Nosy neighbors spreading rumors. Add one psycho.

Susan May says

I couldn't finish this book. I was listening to it, so I thought maybe it was the narration, so I read a few pages.

Nope, wasn't the narration it was the book, alright.

If you want to read Desperate Housewives, but a slower, duller version then do go ahead and try. My suggestion is to read the sample chapters and if you like those, go for it. Pretty much the style of writing is the same throughout. People at dinner parties and everyone looking beautiful, long winded descriptions of houses, and some weird preoccupation with talking about food all the time, and a whiny female protagonist constantly suspicious of her husband who seems too dull to be of interest to another female, although "he's gorgeous." None of these inclusions rock my reading world.

It's doing very well since its release, so it could just be my personal taste. I've given it 2 stars, because it's not the worst book I've read and doesn't have spelling or grammatical mistakes.

My friend Mayra didn't mind it: <https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...>

and my other friend Beth really enjoyed it: <https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...>

Jan says

Not the worst book I've ever read, but a far cry from the 'suspense fiction' it's being called. There was nothing new here, very predictable and uninspired.

The protagonist comes across as insecure and needy, the antagonist is just boring.

It reads quick at just 200 pages, which is its saving grace, or this would have been a DNF.

~ I should note that I just got done reading two killer 5 star books, so maybe this book never stood a chance in the first place.

ARC from NetGalley

Amber Littleton says

I'll be honest; I'm a little baffled at how on earth this book is currently sitting at 4 stars on Amazon. I didn't hate this book, but it was mediocre at best. The story is told from the point of view of the protagonist, Sarah Phoenix. (On a side note, all I could do was roll my eyes when her last name was revealed shortly after the fire. The author might as well have added a footnote that said, "Get it? Symbolism! Get it?") Through the entire novel, I kept wondering why I was supposed to care about this flat, boring woman. She didn't have enough of a personality for me to even dislike her. I nothinged her. I felt similarly about the rest of the characters. They simply did not illicit any sort of feelings one way or another.

There were also several things that didn't make any sense. Someone hangs up on her when she answers a cell phone, and she gets a dial tone? What kind of cell phone gives you a dial tone? She is kept in the hospital for several days for a concussion. Most people are lucky (or unlucky depending on your perspective) to be kept just overnight for a concussion. She doesn't recognize a woman in a picture with her husband, and it turns out to be someone she knows very well. It was just constant.

To top it off, there was nothing suspenseful about this book. There was a lot of talking and not much action. Everything was terribly predictable, and the final conflict was possibly one of the most anti-climactic thing I've ever read. The book ends with one of the side stories completely unresolved, and the main character just kind of shrugs it off. I could pardon that in a longer book, but this one is less than 200 pages. There was no excuse to not flush the story out to completion, although by the end, I was very happy it was so short.

Sandy *The world could end while I was reading and I would never notice* says

I am swimming against the tide with this book which I see has received a lot of two star reviews.

I loved the simplicity of the plot and the author's writing. There was no extraneous material here (other than the constant descriptions of what everyone was wearing!) - just pure storyline.

Sarah and her husband, Dr Johnny MacDonald, have a wonderful life. They live in Johnny's lovely home, have great friends and good neighbours. But one night when Johnny is away at a conference Sarah is awoken by a loud explosion, and her nightmare begins.....

As she picks up the pieces after the tragedy, Sarah discovers a shocking secret, one that will cause her to re-evaluate her whole life and the people she loves.

This is a great read, and I believe a first novel for this author. AJ Banner perfectly captures the uncertainty felt when one's world is tipped upside down and we just don't know who to trust anymore; when we don't even trust our own instincts.

I will be looking for more from AJ Banner.

Thank you to NetGalley and Lake Union Publishing for an ARC of the Good Neighbor in exchange for an honest and unbiased review.

Zoeytron says

Lightweight mystery about some bad things happening to beautiful people in an upscale neighborhood. As a psychological suspense tale, it never even came within shouting distance of the genre. On the upside, the pacing was good and the price was fair. Fast and free, respectively.

This was a Kindle First offering for the month of August.

Theresa Alan says

This is a lightweight mystery that had potential it didn't fulfill. It wasn't bad—it had its moments.

Sarah Phoenix is in love with her new husband, Dr. Johnny McDonald. She has good neighbors—she thinks—until a fire next door leads to tragedy and the unravelling of secrets.

I liked the twist ending. However, once the scoundrel was revealed, the dialogue between Sarah and the mastermind of villainy reminded me of the literary equivalent of a cartoon villain tugging at his mustache while cackling diabolically after tying the damsel in distress to a railroad track—it just had this inauthentic quality to it. Maybe I just like more literary suspense/mystery/thrillers.

For more of my reviews, please visit: <http://www.theresaalan.net/blog>

Greg says

[except for the person who set the fire, he's not described as so handsome it hurts (view spoiler), but the mastermind behind the crime is a beautiful woman, so it's not like only ugly people can commit crimes (hide spoiler)]

Catherine McKenzie says

A swift-paced psychological thriller that I really enjoyed. Coming out soon! Don't miss this one.

Ann says

Two stars to me means that this book is just ok. This book reads like a Lifetime movie Lifetime movie have their place..everyone watches one once, at least, right? What's with this author and the towhees? Swear, she mentioned them four separate times. These are the kind of things I noticed. I read this book in an afternoon. A summer read on my vacation. I had read reviews, alluding to a shocking ending. Meh, not so shocking.

La Petite Américaine says

This book was advertised on my Kindle Fire, so I read the first few pages and downloaded it. I didn't realize

at the time that it was published by Amazon.

Well, for once, I'm not mad at the author.

Instead, I'm furious with Amazon, and whichever of its self-proclaimed "editors" worked on this book. This is precisely why you don't let a metrics-obsessed e-store publish novels: the real editors escape as fast as possible, and the ones left behind are clearly unqualified. That ends up doing a huge disservice to authors, and to readers who pay for this shit.

I wasn't expecting *The Good Neighbor* to go beyond a *Shutter Island* level of literacy, but it never even got that far. I'd say it's the most amateur attempt at a novel I've ever seen, but it's not--it just needed about 6 more rounds at a writing workshop before being submitted anywhere for publication.

And I don't think any of this is the author's fault.

Look. Bad writing happens. It's just fact. But aren't editors supposed to help authors *not* sound like idiots? Isn't that part of the job? Because look at how irritating it can be when editors are asleep at the wheel:

--After being hit on the head, our narrator explains that she'd "suffered a concussion, a mild form of brain injury." I know what a concussion is, thanks.

Or how about this?

--"Eris threw yogurt in the blender. Then she chopped up bananas and turned on the blender." A 3rd grader could figure out how to make these sentences read better. Oh, and the narrator will finish that one smoothie on two separate occasions on the same page.

Didn't *anyone* at Amazon bother to proofread this?

And don't get me started on characters, places, and movement.

--When characters get upset, their features "darken." Don't believe me? "Johnny's eyes darkened." "Todd Severson's face darkened." "Her eyes darkened." "He blinked, his eyes darkening." "Did his eyes just darken in the mirror?"

When their features aren't "darkening," our two main characters show affection by wrapping their arms around each others' waists:

--"He wrapped his arms around my waist, both of us gazing in the mirror," ; "He wrapped his arms around my waist from behind," (that's hot) ; "He wrapped his arms around my waist to steady me" ; "I wrapped my arms around his waist. I needed to feel his solidity." And it's not just these two – even the neighbors do it: "He stepped back...wrapping his arm around his wife's waist." I mean, this is just silly.

--The Hispanic characters speak exactly two words of Spanish at various times throughout the book: "*Dios mio*." Then they break into English again. Well, bad stereotypes do make for great stock characters. Or Looney Tunes characters. (But I'm pretty sure Speedy Gonzales speaks more Spanish than that).

--The lawn of every house where children reside is covered with toys and a bicycle with training wheels. There is no variation here at all—ever.

--Our narrator has some odd need to tell us how everything smells, leading me to think that she has an olfactory disorder, or that her friends are a smelly bunch living in a really stinky place: "He'd smelled different when we'd arrived at the cottage." ; "The air smelled faintly of rosewater." ; " She smelled of patchouli and lip gloss" ; "She smelled like baby powder" ; "He smelled mildly ruddy" (????) ; "She smelled of clove cigarettes and wet wool." Fuck me. Even when I was pregnant and could smell a rotting apple core at the bottom of a trash can six blocks away, I didn't smell as many things as this narrator does. This is clearly a case of the author taking the "show don't tell," advice from kindergarten ("describe the senses!") a little too literally.

So where were the fucking editors? Why weren't they catching these things?

Even worse than ignoring the sloppy repetition, the editors clearly didn't take a stand in places where the writing is simply, undeniably . . . bad. It made for so many utterly **crap-tastic** sections that I was laughing my ass off through a majority of the novel:

--"Autumn was showing off, but sooner or later, autumn would turn into winter, and the trees would lose all of their leaves." This is easily the worst sentence I've read in print in ten years. Hysterical.

--"I could almost see the **flames reflected in his eyes.**" Haha. No, you couldn't. I know what you were going for by writing this, but it's just bad. DELETE.

"Haven't you heard the saying a woman is **like a tea bag**, you never know what she's made of until you dip her in hot water?" LOL!

--"Dr. Johnny McDonald, a **dashing bachelor**..." I'm pretty sure the term "dashing bachelor" should never be in print outside of a Harlequin romance novel. And someone named Johnny McDonald described as a "dashing bachelor" is irresistibly funny.

--"Halfway through the meal, the doorbell rang, a **melodic ding-dong** reverberating through the house." Because there's just...nothing quite like a...melodic ding-dong.

These tidbits were so hilarious that I'd recommend the book for the laugh factor alone. But is that really the goal of a mystery novel? To have readers laughing at the bad writing? I think not. So, again, where was the editor? Why wasn't anyone telling this chick to kill her darlings and fix this stuff??

It gets even more maddening. I read somewhere that our author likes Daphne du Maurier. Well, that's nice. While I appreciate the many instances in the novel where Banner pays homage to du Maurier—the fire, the charred copy of *Rebecca* in the ashes, the young woman taken in by the “dashing bachelor” (gag), the rhododendrons, the creepy dilapidated shack by the water, et. al.—the attempt to imitate her is just...lame. (*Anyone's* attempt at writing like du Maurier would be lame--that's why she's a legend and the rest of us are mediocre). Because how did du Maurier accomplish Maxim's “big reveal” in *Rebecca*? Easy. Maxim confesses because he has to—he thinks he's about to be caught—and what follows is one of literature's greatest plot twists. I get that Banner tried to have a character do a *Rebecca*-esque 180 on us in *The Good Neighbor*, but unsurprisingly, it's a flop: the the bad guy is only mildly surprising, and the “big reveal” happens for no reason, with no twist, just because the book has to end somewhere.

A good editor would have explained to Banner that any attempt to write like du Maurier is bound to fail, and would have had her rewrite the ending.

And why am I blaming the editors instead of the author?

Because believe it or not, Banner has potential, and it's glaringly obvious that she had no editorial guidance. It's not her fault that the book was clearly rushed to publication. And if someone had bothered to do their job, this novel actually could have been a decent read. That's the greatest pity of this book: the mess completely overshadows the few redeeming qualities, especially the author's talent for describing nature. I know well the Washington forests Banner writes about, and run through them every weekend--her descriptions are beautiful and spot-on. Oh, and one plot twist literally made me gasp.

So, the the talent is there. It just needs work. It just needs a goddamn editor.

2 stars because it's not the author's fault...and because I didn't completely hate it.

Magdalena aka A Bookaholic Swede says

Sarah and her husband Johnny have a perfect life together. They live on an idyllic street with nice neighbors and now they are trying to have a child. But everything changes one night when Johnny is away. The house beside theirs burns down and Sarah is injured and their house is also damaged. Sarah and Johnny have to move away to a new house and slowly try to move on, but Sarah feels that something is wrong. Johnny is acting strangely after the fire. Soon she doesn't know what to believe, is their marriage at risk, or is she being paranoid?

This is a fast-paced book with short chapters. Which meant when I started to read it last night was it hard to stop because I really wanted to know the truth about the fire, about Sarah's marriage. If she was being paranoid or not. So I read half the book even though I was only going to read a little.

It's not a perfect book. I feel the ending was a bit too open for my taste. But still a good ending, I wasn't disappointed over it. I just felt that, unless there will be a sequel was it left way too open.

But in the end, did I find **The Good Neighbor** to be a good mystery book. I enjoyed reading it and I especially liked that it was a fast-paced that was something I needed after having read some heavier books lately.

Thanks to Lake Union Publishing and NetGalley for providing me with a free copy of this book in exchange for an honest review!

Karyn Niedert says

I know it's been a few weeks since I started this review, but I had to walk away for a bit to gorge on some decent reading...Kind of a palate cleansing for the brain...

Let's start off with the idea that I really did want to like this book. The blurb made it sound promising, and I dove into it with hopeful intentions, but things went sideways on me pretty darn fast.

I got a strong hint that this was going to be a pretentious pile of crap when Main Character described a piece

of her furniture as "made from sustainable harvested wood." We learned that her mother teaches sign language to deaf children in Nairobi. Main character is a children's book author. Okay, we get it. Heaven is for real and it's in this author's hands. Blah blah barf...Actually, the author missed a golden opportunity when she made Hubs a dermatologist instead of a plastic surgeon who corrects cleft palates in third world countries. Just sayin'.

Later, Main Character is the only one in the neighborhood who can climb up a ladder to save a neighbor's child. Of course, before she begins the climb, she whips out her cell phone to call Hubs, who is out of town on business. Wait, what? Yeah, no bigs. Just climbing up this almost burning ladder. Uh huh.

At one point in the story, she keeps hearing snippets of flirty conversation Hubs is carrying on his cell phone, and when she calls him on it, he asks her if she's eavesdropping on his conversations. Well, duh!

At another point in the book, Main Character and Hubs are having a seemingly deep conversation on the phone while she's driving, and rather than bring it to a natural conclusion, Main Character is all, "Oh, I'm here. Gotta go! Bye!" Sure, because that's how we relate to people in the real world. Real, meaningful exchanges are escaped at the first opportunity. Barf barf.

Hubs generally comes off as a man-whore, and not a particularly sneaky one. The author felt the need to bring his loyalty to Main Character into question every opportunity she got. Hubs' "gaze remained on Evie" (Evie not being Main Character), "he smiled appreciatively", and he "traded a look, an unspoken message passing between them". Barf barf blech barf barf.

While babysitting young four year old Mia (she of the burned up house next door) Main Character spots a strange dog in her front yard. She moseys to the front yard, telling Mia to "stay put for a sec" (because being still is what four year olds a known for) and carries a full conversation with the dog people. Amazingly, when she returns, Mia is nowhere to be found. Box of rocks = smarter than the Main Character.

This is pretty much where I threw my hands up and said "uncle". There's only so much drivel a gal can take, and I was full up.

So, this is where I leave you. It may have ended better, but I'll never know. Because I had better things to do. Much better things. My cat's claws needed a trim. The garbage pail in the kitchen needed to be washed out. The gutters needed to be cleaned. You understand...

This book was a gawd-awful waste of time, effort, on the parts of everyone involved with bringing this author's dreck to light.

I'll publish a full review this weekend, but I wanted to give a head's up warning to those of you thinking of adding this to your Must Read list.

Becky says

I don't even know where to start in on this shitfest. Honestly. It was terrible. TERRIBLE. For a quote-unquote "psychological thriller" that is less than 200 pages long, it took me forever to read, because every

other sentence I'd have to stop my eyes from trying to roll out of my head.

This was quite possibly the stupidest thing I've read all year, and that includes Sliver, which previously held that esteemed honor. At least Sliver kinda had a plot. This garbage had no plot, no point, nothing. Zip, zero, zilch. Which, thankfully, is also what I paid for it, so I guess all I've really lost is a couple dozen IQ points and two days of my life.

I don't really have the energy to recap this book. It's too stupid, and trying to lay it out in a coherent and concise way for anyone reading my review would just take more patience than I have.

The plot was non-existent, and the resolution came completely out of left field. Of course, none of the book made any sense at all, so maybe it was just trying to fit in.

There were too many characters, and they were all bullshit stock characters, and all of them were OH SO BEAUTIFUL. Breathtakingly beautiful. Stunning, gorgeous, voluptuous (unless one needs to be waiflike in memory!), sultry, etc. Every woman who lived next door to our main character was literally the world's most beautiful woman, and each successful in their own way. First was the model, who was successful at being pleasant to look at. Then there was the art person, who is so beautiful and successful at art that she can make paintings not be burnt anymore. Then there's the real estate agent who is so beautiful and successful that she could sell a house to a... house buying person.

I don't fucking know. Didn't I just say that this book cost me IQ points? I rest my case.

But to counter all these gorgeous vagina-bearers, there were men. I think. One who... did something? But he's dead now. Another one who looked really grumpy and rude. But he was only there for literally like one paragraph. Supposedly there's another guy... has a kid named after him? Ate dinner once? Yeah him.

But then there's JOHNNY. JOHNNY is perfect! He is totally not controlling or creepy at all. I give you exhibit A, which finds us with Sarah (JOHNNY'S wife) following him on a run and watching him go into another woman's house.

I had already broken a promise by clandestinely following my husband. *You can always trust me*, he'd said on our honeymoon. *Never question my love for you*. I had replied, *I promise*, and he had squeezed my hand, his gaze clear and unflinching. *I want this marriage to work, so you have to talk to me. Tell me everything that's on your mind. Right away. Don't hide anything. Don't omit any details*. Johnny would have a good explanation [for secretly visiting another woman's home].

Yeah. See? Totally not weird or big flashing warning signish at all!

JOHNNY is perfect and leaves newspapers strewn on the counter, and cooks, and leaves crumbs under his chair, but knows that his wife's favorite foods are challah bread and... fucking I don't know, she lost me at challah bread. Is that really a thing? Challah being a favorite food? It's bread. BREAD. Pretty bread, tasty bread, but just... fucking... bread. I wonder if the crumbs are from the bread, and whether JOHNNY'S wife gets upset at the waste.

Also:

Also JOHNNY wraps his arms around his wife person. Because that is love and stuff. Well that's how you

SHOW love, apparently. How you TELL love is this nauseating phrase: "I love you only."

I think that's supposed to be sweet, in a saccharine fucking nightmare world, but MY cynical ass is like "Why are you specifying? Got something to hide?"

I kinda feel sorry for JOHNNY, actually, because the author has no fucking idea what to do with him. He is either a perfect husband, or the cheating asshole. The author can't make up her mind, but doesn't have the guts to go full on bad-guy, because you know, then she - I mean the main character, who is totally not author wish fulfillment material - wouldn't have a man, and remember all those beautiful women? They all are validated by men... except the crazy one. So, the moral of this story is: if you don't have a man, you're a psychotic murderer.

There were some other people in the book, I mean, names of people, since they never actually APPEARED in the book. But whatever. I'm over the cardboard characters.

Let's get to the "writing". Because OH GOLLY GEE, wasn't THAT a blast. This... I can't. I had to stop there and go back and put those quotation marks around the word writing in the last sentence. These are a collection of random sentences that occasionally go together, but more often are just bizarrely placed. During dialogue, it's like the people are having two completely different discussions. Random descriptive detail is added at the most awkward times, and things happen, only to be a convenient method of getting to a given outcome, and then the thing that happened will just be completely glossed over or forgotten. For instance, a 4 year old little girl steals a pair of shoes from a store and runs out to lock herself in the narrator's car, where she "conveniently" forgot her keys. The purpose of this was to get a teenager who was with them to tempt the little girl out of the car with "magical princess makeup" - which the narrator recognizes from the ENGRAVED INITIALS on the lipstick and compact (because apparently people do that?) and confronts her about it, because those belonged to the little girl's dead mother.

The fact that the little girl stole shoes is completely forgotten, and in fact later on in the story, she still has the fucking shoes. So not only did her theft and running away go unpunished, even unscolded, but one is to assume that she was actually rewarded for it. But the more pressing matter is the confrontation of the teen who has lipstick that didn't belong to her. Of course.

Chapters are ended in the most awkward times, I'm guessing in an attempt at suspense, but it was just pathetic. And speaking of pathetic, I pegged the killer the absolute moment she was introduced, and then every single time she was around, I just couldn't understand how everyone else seemed oblivious to her. Ridiculous.

This book was awful. Not the worst I've ever read, but if I'd paid money for it, I damn sure would be getting that refund. Save your time and brain cells and use them on something worthwhile.

Mo says

2.5 but will round it up the 3 as I did enjoy the first half of the book.

This started of strong. Interesting prologue... then about 60% in I got the feeling that it would all go downhill from then. And it sort of did... and that ending!!

From the book blurb.

"A. J. Banner illuminates the darkest corners of the human heart with her stories of suspense."

Now, I read a lot of Suspense books but this one fell short for me.

What suspense?

Honestly, I cannot believe that this is a Top 100 seller on Amazon.

I just felt that towards the end she was throwing everything but the kitchen sink into the storyline.

As I said, it started off strong but it ended on a fizzle, not a bang for me.
