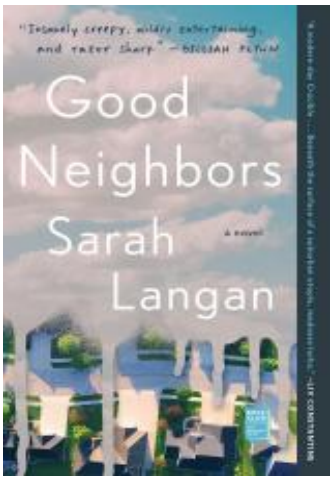
Good Neighbors

by Sarah Langan



About the Book

Celeste Ng?s enthralling dissection of suburbia meets Shirley Jackson?s creeping dread in this propulsive literary noir, when a sudden tragedy exposes the depths of deception and damage in a Long Island suburb --- pitting neighbor against neighbor and putting one family in terrible danger.

Welcome to Maple Street, a picture-perfect slice of suburban Long Island, its residents bound by their children, their work and their illusion of safety in a rapidly changing world.

But menace skulks beneath the surface of this exclusive enclave, making its residents prone to outrage. When the Wilde family moves in, they trigger their neighbors? worst fears. Dad Arlo is a gruff has-been rock star with track marks. Mom Gertie has a thick Brooklyn accent, with high heels and tube tops to match. Their weird kids cuss like sailors. They don?t fit with the way Maple Street sees itself.

Though Maple Street?s Queen Bee, Rhea Schroeder --- a lonely college professor repressing a dark past --- welcomed Gertie and her family at first, relations went south during one spritzer-fueled summer evening, when the new best friends shared too much, too soon. By the time the story opens, the Wildes are outcasts.

As tensions mount, a sinkhole opens in a nearby park, and Rhea?s daughter Shelly falls inside. The search for Shelly brings a shocking accusation against the Wildes. Suddenly, it is one mom?s word against the other?s in a court of public opinion that can end only in blood.

A riveting and ruthless portrayal of American suburbia, GOOD NEIGHBORS excavates the perils and betrayals of motherhood and friendships and the dangerous clash between social hierarchy, childhood trauma and fear.

Discussion Guide

1. Before tragedy strikes on Maple Street, Julia and Shelly have a growing friendship. Other than the circumstance of being neighbors, what do you think bonds the girls together? Discuss what they have in common.

2. A parallel friendship is that of Julia?s and Shelly?s mothers, Gertie and Rhea. How does the arc of the mothers? friendship mirror that of their daughters?? How does it differ?

3. The suburban setting of GOOD NEIGHBORS is integral to the book itself. How does Sarah Langan describe Maple Street? What are its physical characteristics? How do these characteristics influence the neighbors who live there? Do you think this novel could have been set anywhere other than a wealthy suburb?

4. Maple Street is in the middle of two environmental crises: a heatwave and a sinkhole. Why do you think the author chose to incorporate very physical emergencies into the internal emergencies the characters experience in the novel?

5. What typically suburban, idyllic summertime activities are distorted by the sinkhole and its surrounding tragedies? Would you consider GOOD NEIGHBORS satirical?

6. Discuss the author?s choice to include book excerpts and newspaper articles throughout the book. Did you feel this was an effective storytelling technique? Did any of the characters? fates surprise you?

7. What qualities make the Wildes good scapegoats for the problems on Maple Street? Why do the longtime residents of the street believe the rumors about the Wildes so readily?

8. Almost every resident of Maple Street hides a secret. What are the neighbors? attitudes about keeping or revealing secrets? What does it say about their characters?

9. Was there one character or family in the neighborhood whose story most intrigued you? How did your opinions change as you learned more about them?

10. While gossip may have fueled many of the plot?s shocking events, all of the rumors and whispers stem from fear. Discuss what you think each of the main characters fears. What are the collective fears of the neighborhood? How is fear expressed on Maple Street?

11. Do you feel that Shelly receives justice by the end of the novel?

Author Bio

Sarah Langan, a Columbia MFA graduate and three-time recipient of the Bram Stoker Award, is the author of several novels, including A BETTER WORLD, GOOD NEIGHBORS and TRAD WIFE. She?s got an MS in environmental health science, grew up on Long Island, and she currently lives in Los Angeles with her husband and daughters.

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