

and the ominous sounds he hears echoing through the building at night. "If there is indeed magic (as I now believe)," continues Paddy in his journal, "then magic exists everywhere . . ." (119). But magic is a force that can be used for good or evil. The magic that dwells at 99 Crowley Close soon threatens not only Paddy but also the children who are searching for him.

This mystery for readers from approximately ten-to-twelve years is fast-paced and delves deeply into the realm of the supernatural. It takes place in and around 99 Crowley Close, the old apartment building where Paddy Martel and the children live. The setting creates and sustains tension throughout the story. The ancient building with its carved stone figures and eery, darkened hallways comes alive and grows more and more sinister as the story progresses. "The walls seemed to lean forward as if listening. Shadows reached long fingers toward the children. Stone lips murmured. Wood and mortar replied" (83).

Occasional brief passages in which Paddy himself describes his strange prison and speculates on his fate give the reader glimpses of Paddy's danger. Halloween is three days away and we learn that Paddy fears that his captor will be observing it by sacrificing him. We also learn that the other residents of the strange old building are in danger. And as Liz, her younger sister Gem and aspiring detective Shamus Hefferling get closer to the truth, the evil does indeed loom larger around them, especially when Liz Rider follows her gut feeling – and her friend – right into the witch's lair. When the smoke clears, Paddy and Liz are reunited and new friendships have been established. Beverley Spencer writes simply and naturally. Her plot holds the reader's interest until the last word. For young readers who like their mysteries with a strong supernatural flavour, *Paddy Martel is missing* is highly recommended.

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NEW IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

Next-door neighbours. Sarah Ellis. Douglas & McIntyre, 1989. 123 pp., \$7.95 paper. ISBN 0-88899-084-7.

Like Margaret Drabble's *The radiant way*, Sarah Ellis's second novel *Next-door neighbours* takes its name from a grade-school primer. And Ellis, like Drabble, has laden her title with irony.

We get to know three next-door neighbours in Ellis's book. The protagonist Peggy's open, trusting and unusual friend, George Slobodkin, is pleased to discover that he bears this title, although he lives next-door on the lane

rather than the street. Sing Lee, the Chinese "houseboy," lives next door and is a genuine friend. Yet he is shut away in the basement and treated like an untrustworthy servant by Mrs. Manning, the only real next-door neighbour in the book .

Here lies the irony. For Mrs Manning is a blustering fool, a character never to be found in a children's reader or a Mr. Rogers neighbourhood. Sarah Ellis creates no stock characters and, without straying from Peggy's viewpoint, she manages to show Mrs. Manning's human side. She is lonely, pathetic and frightened and from these spring her cruelty, bigotry and lack of insight.

Peggy is new in the neighbourhood and this carries an added burden because she is excruciatingly shy. She complicates her life by telling a grand lie to a group of girls on her first day of school, thus isolating herself. School becomes torture and that leaves her family and her neighbours. Through her relationships with George, Sing and Mrs. Manning she grows enough over the summer holidays to face the girls at school in September and to put her lie behind her.

As Peggy enters back into this intense world, her friendship with George wanes. He is not lost from her life, but Ellis recognizes growth and change and places Peggy exactly where she would be at this point. Thus *Next-door neighbours* comes full circle, starting and ending with school.

Perhaps the circle is a little too perfect; we are carried a little too far into Peggy's future and are provided with several too many neatly-wrapped packages. But it is nice to see everything work out and the magic that is woven throughout the book far outweighs a slightly pat conclusion.

At the centre of *Next-door neighbours* is the puppet show which Peggy and George prepare together and which Sing and George's father make possible with their help and suggestions. The project is beautifully simple, but fraught with the obstacles that children would face under the circumstances. And it radiates consequences: great, terrible and inescapable.

Adult readers may find a note of nostalgia in this book, for it is set in 1956. It is not quite clear why Ellis has chosen the '50's instead of the '80's, but perhaps this is not an important question to answer since the year will not come between a child and the story.

Next-door neighbours is a gripping, powerfully-written novel fit to join Sarah Ellis's award-winning *The baby project* on the shelf; fit also to stand side by side with its titular companion, *The radiant way*.

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