



The New Neighbor: A Novel

By Leah Stewart

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In the tradition of Zoe Heller's *What Was She Thinking? Notes on a Scandal*, *The New Neighbor* is "a chilling page-turner" (*People*) a darkly sophisticated novel about an old woman's curiosity turned into a dangerous obsession as she becomes involved in her new neighbor's complicated and cloaked life.

How much can you really know about the woman next door?

Ninety-year-old Margaret Riley is content hiding from the world. Stoic and independent, she rarely leaves the Tennessee mountaintop where she lives, finding comfort in the mystery novels that keep her company—until she spots a woman who's moved into the long-empty house across the pond.

Her neighbor, Jennifer Young, is also looking to hide. On the run from her old life, she and her four-year-old son, Milo, have moved to a quiet town where no one from her past can find her.

In Jennifer, Margaret sees both a potential companion for her loneliness and a mystery to be solved. She thinks if she says the right thing, tells the right story, Jennifer will open up, but Jennifer refuses to talk about herself, her son, his missing father, or her past. Frustrated, Margaret crosses more and more boundaries in pursuit of the truth, threatening to unravel the new life Jennifer has so painstakingly created—and reveal some secrets of her own...

From the critically acclaimed author of *The History of Us* and *The Myth of You and Me*, *The New Neighbor* explores the secrets that bind people together and drive them apart.

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Editorial Review

Review

“In simple, elegant language, Leah Stewart draws us to a little pond hidden away in the mountains of Tennessee...[and] never relaxes her tight focus on these complex characters.”—*New York Times Book Review*

“A chilling page-turner.”—*People* (*People* Picks)

“After only a few pages into Leah Stewart's *The New Neighbor*, the shrewd sharp voice of one of its main characters kept me reading.” (*Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*)

“One of the protagonists of Leah Stewart's new novel, *The New Neighbor*, reads mystery novels, and only mystery novels, but she is a snob about them: she only wants to read the best. Well, she would love, love, love *The New Neighbor*, which is as tense and as tough-minded and as ingeniously structured as our best mystery novels, and our best literary novels, too. A major new book by one of our most psychologically astute writers.” (Brock Clarke, author of *The Happiest People in the World*)

“Leah Stewart skillfully captures conversational nuance and family alienation.”—*The Charlotte Observer*

“Readers who like an unhurried pace, an element of mystery, and plenty of symbolism will be satisfied as Stewart brings her tale to a surprising conclusion.”—*Library Journal*

“A quiet standout...[Stewart] choreographs a near-perfect perfect psychological dance here, her Jennifer and Margaret pulsing with life and her storyline, a la 'Rear Window,' keeps us guessing to the end.”—Buffalo News

“The writing is beautiful, and [Leah Stewart] does an impressive job of giving the reader a sense of place.”—Mystery Scene

“Stewart deftly writes about the nuances of friendship and motherhood, as well as the past's unpleasant ability to take over the present.”—BookPage

“A promising exploration of the secrets we all carry and our refusal to forgive ourselves.” (*Publishers Weekly*)

“Stewart's prose is remarkable for its well-shaped sentences and nonshowy but sharp observations. Quietly incisive.” (*Kirkus Reviews*)

“Keenly engrossing and multilayered, this mystery and literary-fiction hybrid will elicit rich book-group discussions.” (*Booklist*)

“Two women—a snoopy old lady and a young mom with a mysterious past who moves in nearby—discover each other's dark secrets.”—*Good Housekeeping* (“Thrills and Chills”)

"A truly fine absorbing novel; the finest new novel this reader has discovered so far this season. Highly, highly recommended."—*Hudson Valley News*

"Intellectual intrigue . . . Stewart also offers the thrill of sharp realism that has characterized her previous novels. She's skilled at creating characters who are all too recognizable in their foibles and desires; she dissects the way ordinary, flawed people think of one another and their social spheres — the silent preferences and judgments that accompany any interaction."—*Knoxville News Sentinel*

About the Author

Leah Stewart is the critically acclaimed author of *The History of Us*, *Husband and Wife*, *The Myth of You and Me*, and *Body of a Girl*. The recipient of a Sachs Fund Prize and a NEA Literature Fellowship, she teaches in the creative writing program at the University of Cincinnati and lives in Cincinnati with her husband and two children. Visit her online at LeahStewart.com.

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The New Neighbor

Signs of Life

Where before there was no one, suddenly I, Margaret Riley, have a neighbor. I went out on the back deck this morning like every morning, and there she was. Across the pond, sitting on her own back deck. I was startled. That house has been empty a long time. My first impulse was to go back inside, as if I'd come upon something shameful, or embarrassed myself. As if I were out there naked, which of course I wasn't, and even if I had been she was too far away to see. But I am braver than that. I put my coffee cup on the table, as usual, and then I went back inside for my book, which is by P. D. James, a remarkable woman, as ancient as I am and still creating mysteries. I have to make two trips because I need one hand for the cane. Sometimes I try to manage cane and book and coffee all at once, and the result is always coffee stains, or burns, or at the very least a wet book and a diminished cup of coffee. Every morning I'm frustrated anew by the need to make two trips. Impatience and age are not compatible.

She was still there when I came back out. I lowered myself into my chair. I felt self-conscious that she might be watching this slow maneuvering, like I am when someone watches me trying to park my car. The position of my chair ensured that if I looked up from my book I looked directly at her. I knew I wouldn't move my chair—because it would be rude, and because it's heavy—but I thought about doing so anyway. I drank my coffee slowly, pretending to gaze out over the pond, which is what I do every morning, though usually without the presence of someone who might be watching me.

Strange that she didn't wave. Wasn't it? But I hadn't waved either. I couldn't make out her face, of course—the pond is an acre across—but I could see the yellowish smudge of her long hair, and so I knew she was young, or at least much younger than I. Was it the job of the younger person to be the first to wave? Certainly it cost her less to move. She was wearing something purple. I think it was a purple bathrobe. I like purple myself, but that poem about the old ladies and the red hats has made it impossible for me to wear it.

The coffee cup was empty. I set it down, careful to push it back from the edge of the table, and reached for my book. Before I opened it I looked right at her. There was no way to know for sure but she seemed to be looking right back at me. I lifted my hand off my lap and extended my arm. What I mean is, I waved. I left my arm suspended a moment. She didn't move. My arm fell back into my lap, a heavy thing. I was about to look down at my book like nothing had happened, like a cat casually licking its whiskers, pretending it didn't

just smack into the wall. Then she moved. I swear—I know she was far away and even with my glasses I have an old lady's eyesight—but I swear, she jerked first, like she'd started to wave back and been restrained. Then she raised her arm and returned my greeting.

"Hello," I said aloud, though she couldn't hear me of course.

A few minutes went by, both of us sitting there enjoying the morning. A large bird of prey flew high above the pond and I tracked it with my eyes as it headed back into the trees. Probably a turkey vulture, but I liked to pretend it was a hawk. I glanced at my neighbor and saw her head turned up, too, watching until the bird vanished. She looked back at me—of course I couldn't see her eyes but I know she looked—and I nodded. We had watched the bird together. We had seen it disappear, and maybe felt together a needless longing for its return. We were almost companionable. Then she got up and went inside her house.

I was surprised, when she was gone, by a twinge of loneliness. How silly. I am always alone. Sometimes days go by in which the only other people I see are on TV. This house is in the woods between two small towns—villages, really—on a mountain in Tennessee. I live here by myself. It's been years since I lived with another person. I don't ever want to live with another person again. I'm nearly ninety-one now, unimaginable as that sounds, and I will be alone until I die. Before they put me in a nursing home, in forced companionship with the sick and the dying, I will fling myself into the pond. I'll weight my pockets with rocks, like Virginia Woolf, whose books I did my best to understand. All her words float away when I think of her. I see her crouched at the edge of the water, searching for just the right stones.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Jackson Ponce:

Why don't make it to become your habit? Right now, try to prepare your time to do the important act, like looking for your favorite book and reading a reserve. Beside you can solve your short lived problem; you can add your knowledge by the book entitled The New Neighbor: A Novel. Try to the actual book The New Neighbor: A Novel as your buddy. It means that it can to become your friend when you truly feel alone and beside those of course make you smarter than previously. Yeah, it is very fortuned to suit your needs. The book makes you a lot more confidence because you can know everything by the book. So , let us make new experience and also knowledge with this book.

Alberto Benson:

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