



Safer

Sean Doolittle

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In **Safer**, a young couple moves into an idyllic little cul-de-sac—and ignites a harrowing journey into darkness as a shocking accusation is made, a family is shattered, and the mystery of a long-ago crime begins to unravel.

For Paul Callaway and his wife, Sara, moving from the East Coast to a quiet midwestern town was a major adjustment. But right from the start, Paul has tried to fit in. He's played golf with the guys. He's even joined the Neighborhood Patrol, grabbing a flashlight and a walkie-talkie to make these neatly tended streets even safer. Then Paul makes one mistake—and now they want him gone. But nothing could have prepared Paul and Sara for the quarrel that has erupted between Paul and a neighbor—the self-appointed leader of the Neighborhood Patrol. Or for the next outrage, as police arrest Paul for a sordid crime he didn't commit. Suddenly Paul's life, university career, and marriage are at risk, as he finds himself locked in a desperate fight with an angry man, a dark conspiracy, and a secret that began with a child's disappearance ten years before.

Safer Details

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From Reader Review Safer for online ebook

Pat says

I thought this story had a lot of potential and the style of the narration was a bit different and worked quite well, IMHO. You got the impression there were layers to the events being described.

Paul and Sara Callaway are new arrivals in a cup-de-sac in a smallish town. On the first night in their new home they are confronted with an intruder in the bedroom. This serves as a catalyst to increase membership of the local Neighbourhood Watch committee, and Paul and Sara are urged to get involved.

Self appointed community safety spokesperson, Roger Mallory, a former policeman, is very active in jollying along his neighbours but Paul starts to find his interventions a bit over the top and not altogether welcome. It seems that Mallory has an unhealthy interest in the very intimate goings on of all his neighbours. After Paul calls him out on some of his behaviour, things start going not so well for the Callaway household and eventually Paul is arrested on child pornography charges.

For the most part this book was quite chilling because it was all so plausible. It fell away for me (and lost a star) because I thought the ending was a bit rushed and lacked plausibility. A shame really as I could otherwise imagine such a thing actually happening somewhere. We've all heard of neighbourhood feuds but this was so much more subtle - until the slightly mangled ending. Overall a good story.

Rita says

I liked it a lot until the end. My big question is "WHY?" I can't give it 4 stars because I'm confused about the ending. I'd appreciate someone telling me why "THEY" did what they did.

S. Wilson says

Everyone wants to live in a town where everyone knows each other, where everyone keeps an eye out for their neighbor, a place where you always belong. But what if this idyllic community slowly turned into a Brave New Neighborhood? What everyone knew you more than you would like, your neighbors kept to close an eye on you, and when they didn't like what they saw, decided that you were no longer welcome?

Doolittle takes a handful of modern paranoid fears and combines them into a tight, engaging, and suspenseful tale of abusive power and overly cautious neighbors.

When Paul Callaway follows his wife and her new job of assistant dean to a cozy little midwestern town, he already feels a little out of place. He tries his best to fit in with his new neighbors, but quickly finds himself clashing with the local community's version of John Walsh; the father of an abducted and murdered child who now spearheads civic response teams and neighborhood watches.

Paul's marriage begins to fray at the edges, and his disagreement with his manipulative neighbor turns into a full blown feud. Then he discovers that there's much more going on behind the scenes than anyone imagined,

and before he knows what's happening, he's being arrested on charges of sexual misconduct with his neighbor's teenage daughter.

What follows is a journey into the substantive fears of the modern man. Exactly how much of our lives is under surveillance? How many freedoms do we willingly and unknowingly sacrifice in the name of security? How do you prove your innocence when a minor falsely accuses you of sexual improprieties? Can one man really prevail against the system when the system has it out for him?

Everyone just wants to feel safe. But as Paul Callaway soon discovers, sometimes the safer you feel, the more at risk you truly are.

Like any good suspense novel, the key is believability. Doolittle keeps everything within the realm of reason, and has no trouble convincing the reader to play along. The personalities are distinct but never overblown, the events that take place are always feasible, and the motivations of the characters are never questionable.

As with the best suspense novels, it is scary because you believe it could happen to you.

Atef Attia says

Sécurité renforcée, c'est avant tout une idée brillante et dans l'air du temps : celle de l'obsession sécuritaire et ses dérives, transposée à l'échelle d'un petit quartier américain sans histoires. Faut-il renoncer à une partie de ses libertés pour avoir un minimum de sécurité en plus. Le sujet prête à débats et Sean Doolittle, fort heureusement, ne sombre pas dans le pamphlet réactionnaire où la démonstration lourdesse pour nous exposer son point de vue. Cela ne l'empêche pas non plus d'avoir un avis précis sur la question. De ce fait, Sécurité renforcée s'inscrit dans une veine sociétale qui le place dans la lignée d'un Harlan Coben, fait assez rare chez Rivages pour être mentionné. (La maison d'édition cite d'ailleurs l'auteur dans le bandeau promotionnel de ce livre).

Mais une idée brillante suffit-elle à faire un bon roman ? Assurément non. Et c'est là que Doolittle démontre un talent certain pour le storytelling : Maîtrisant la grammaire du polar sur le bout des doigts, l'auteur opte d'abord pour une narration éclatée qui commence par le point d'orgue de l'intrigue, l'arrestation sans finesse du protagoniste, au beau milieu d'un dîner mondain. La confusion du lecteur se mêle bien vite à celle du héros puisque la narration est à la première personne, une vue subjective loin d'être fortuite puisqu'elle ne nous laisse pas le choix, on devra le croire sur parole. Et ce n'est pas toujours évident.

Venons en donc au vrai point fort du livre. Pour donner corps à son propos, Doolittle articule son histoire autour d'un duel entre deux personnages principaux que -forcément- tout oppose. Paul Callaway, le héros, est un type tout ce qu'il y a de plus banal, à mille lieues du héros ricain à la mâchoire carrée et aux couilles en acier. Paul est un prof universitaire qui faire preuve d'une belle ouverture mais qui peut aussi se comporter comme un connard et monter vite sur ses grands chevaux. Autant dire que l'identification avec lui est aisée et immédiate et l'on s'attache rapidement à cet homme ordinaire qui se fait lentement broyer par un système qui le dépasse. Face à lui, le vrai coup de maître, c'est l'antagoniste : Roger Mallory. Un ancien flic marqué par la mort brutale de son fils et de sa femme des années auparavant et qui depuis, s'occupe de la sécurité du voisinage via une compagnie qu'il a créé et qu'il chapeaute. Mallory a tous les arguments pour convaincre. Avec son air affable et prévenant et le drame personnel qui l'a touché, il est facile d'éprouver de l'empathie à son égard. Mais comme souvent, les apparences sont trompeuses et l'auteur, par d'habiles indices disséminés ici et là, révèle peu à peu ses déviations et dénonce à travers elles le fascisme ordinaire qui guette toutes les

bonnes intentions. Le temps que Callaway découvre ce qui se trame réellement il est trop tard : le piège s'est déjà refermé sur lui, d'autant plus que Mallory semble avoir toute la police à sa botte.

L'autre point fort de Sécurité renforcée, est son ambiance paranoïaque qui monte en puissance jusqu'à un final d'un beau cynisme. Le talent de Sean Doolittle est de ne jamais être trop démonstratif et de laisser la mécanique implacable de son récit prendre son cours. Il n'est pas rare de sourire très souvent au fil des pages, surtout dans la première moitié. Les accusations qui pèsent sur lui sont d'autant plus invraisemblables qu'elles sont cousues de fil blanc et qu'il serait facile de les mettre en échec. Mais Paul est tellement borné, maladroit, et impulsif qu'il foire systématiquement toutes les chances de s'innocenter, au grand désespoir de son avocat. Au fil des pages cependant, la tension monte à mesure que les événements prennent une tournure de plus en plus dramatique et qu'il y va de sa propre vie.

Avec Sécurité rapprochée, Sean Doolittle signe un roman prenant et maîtrisé de bout en bout. Loin des gros blockbusters du polar aux twists qui vous arrachent la tête, son roman respire la force tranquille et s'offre au passage le luxe d'adresser en finesse un message sur un sujet polémique. Un auteur à suivre assurément et un roman à découvrir sans tarder.

Dennis D. says

Author Sean Doolittle sets his hook with the very first sentence: "my wife, Sara, and I are hosting a faculty party at our home when the Clark Falls Police Department arrives to take me into custody." In very quick fashion, we learn the following: Paul Callaway has no idea that he's about to be arrested, even after he greets the police on his front stoop. He's a college English professor. He and his wife only recently moved to this small Midwestern town. He's being charged with the sexual exploitation of a minor. And his accuser is not one of his students, but instead is his next-door neighbor's 13-year old daughter.

We then learn who the Callaways are, how Paul came to find himself in jail, and who he thinks is really responsible for him being there (hint: it's not the 13-year old girl). He has apparently gotten himself on the bad side of one Roger Mallory. Mallory is an ex-cop with a tragic past, and he comes across as someone beyond reproach. He is a civic leader, a pillar of the community, and, most importantly, the head of Clark Falls' volunteer citizens-on-patrol brigade.

There's a significant back-story, beginning with the Callaways very first day as residents of Clark Falls. Doolittle effectively uses a first person narrative to parse out just a few of the relevant facts at a time, revealing hidden connections and dirty secrets worthy of Wisteria Lane. There are some nice twists here, yet I was still able to suspend disbelief. Then things go a little off the rails at the very end, as characters start doing things that make no sense at all, and the story almost stumbles to a finish. But Doolittle manages to rescue the whole affair with a pretty convincing sort-of-epilogue, in which two of the central characters hash out what just happened.

Safer is a smart little thriller, but take my review and rating with a grain of salt. I always have a soft spot for a thriller that doesn't rely on any of the old stand-bys for its protagonist. Namely, cop, ex-cop, detective, lawyer, or my personal favorite: ex-Special Forces drifter.

Brian Sison says

When I picked this up, I thought it would be very similar to Caught by Harlan Coben. Though there were some similarities, I feel like this was a much stronger book.

In both books, an otherwise good upstanding citizen is accused of sexual crimes against a child. In both books, the accused vehemently denies said allegations. That's where the parallels end.

Unlike the tough, me-against-the-world, Jason-Bourne-lite characters that populate the Coben novels, Paul Callaway is a real person... a mild-mannered literature professor at the local college. The protagonist is even honest enough to mock himself when he realizes he's nothing like the modern day hero that he reads about in his trash novels late at night.

I'd say that 80% of this book was worth 5 stars. The rapid-fire opening spilling into various flash-backs and flash-forwards really developed the characters and made them more three-dimensional. Doolittle is much better at the foundation laying and story telling than others in the suspense genre. Unfortunately, it felt like the author hit a wall when the climax was approaching. The resolution was unexpected almost to the point of absurdity. Still, this was just a poor ending to an otherwise very strong novel.

Marianne K says

I was expecting more from this novel, it's well-written but lackluster, maybe due to me not liking the main character very much. It's a very quick read but the book seems to fall apart about three-quarters of the way through. I did not like the ending, it was like everyone in the small Iowa town was corrupt.

Shelby *trains flying monkeys* says

Pretty decent page turner. Just goes to show that you really don't know your neighbors.

John Seyfarth says

Paul Callaway and his wife Sara have moved to a town in Iowa where Sara has taken a job at a regional university. Police show up and arrest Paul for sexual exploitation of a minor. Paul is not guilty, but it takes 334 pages to explain why he is suspected of the crime.

Maddy says

RATING: 4.0

In today's world, the headlines are full of stories about predators on the loose, rampant crime and an overwhelming message that the world is not really a safe place. People are afraid to let their children play

outside by themselves. Most of us are willing to go to extra lengths to protect our loved ones. It's actually comforting to live in a place where there is an active neighborhood crime patrol and where people are alert to what is going on around them. But what happens when the protectors go to such extremes that they are the ones causing danger in their community?

That's the situation that Paul Callaway and his wife Sara face when they relocate to a small town in Iowa. Everyone in the immediate vicinity is part of the neighborhood crime patrol. They go out in pairs at night and monitor the area for any trouble. The leader of the patrol organization is an ex-military man named Roger Mallory, who lives across the street from the Callaways. Although he's done a lot of good in his role, there's also a bit of the zealot about him that causes Paul not to entirely trust him.

Paul has innocently served as a mentor to one of his other neighbor's daughters, 13-year-old Brittany Seward. Before he knows it, he is arrested for sexually exploiting the young woman. Unbeknownst to Paul, there are video cameras hidden around the neighborhood, and they clearly show Brittany visiting his home. Of course, Paul then becomes the target of his neighbors' wrath; how can he prove himself innocent when everything supports Brittany's story?

Doolittle excels at ratcheting up the suspense and throwing suspicion about the strange things happening in the community at several of the homeowners, some of whom are not as lily white and law abiding as they like to portray themselves. Beyond the horrible accusation, Paul faces a lot of danger; and his relationship with his wife is subject to the stresses as well.

One technique that Doolittle employed a few times in the book that didn't work well for me was some authorial asides to the reader, most particularly one that had to do with establishing the reliability of the narrator. In general, the characterization is good; I did feel that the portrayal of Roger could have used a few more nuances, although his extremism was generally believable.

Overall, Safer succeeded because Doolittle was successful at tapping into the fears that each and every one of us have about our own safety, as well as our ability to defend ourselves when accused of a crime we did not commit. The fact that the author builds these themes within a nicely twisting plot made the book a compelling read.

Elaine says

An Ex-cop with a Fresh Spin

Paul's neighbor Roger who lives across the street takes the liberty of spying and keeping tabs (yes, files) on the neighbors but little does he know someone knows something about *him*. Roger has the dirt on those around him and manipulates it to the max, making stuff up to fit his needs. He's an ex-cop whom the community has come to trust making it all the more sinister. I think of a man with his hand extended for a handshake while in the other, a stiletto behind his back.

After Paul is arrested on a bogus felony charge compliments of good ol' Roger, and spends the night in jail, much to his chagrin, his attorney shows up late in court smelling like a brewery and can't get Paul's name right as he addresses the judge. And this is the guy who's going to represent him on this bogus charge? Things aren't looking too good for Paul.

Is it just me or did somewhere around 3/4 of the way in, the story start to unravel and fizzle? I was kind of “Huh? What? Am I missing something?”

Delee says

[image error]

Kelly Hager says

This book jumps back and forth over several months. It opens with the main character being arrested and goes on to explain how he's been set up (or so he says) by a neighbor of his, Roger, who is (of course) the most beloved man in town.

It's a very suspenseful book and I had a hard time putting it down. I wasn't crazy about the ending, but I may have just been exhausted from not ever wanting to put it down to do things like, say, sleep. :)

I'll see how I feel about it after a re-read. :)

Kees van Duyn says

Tijdens een feestje bij hem thuis wordt Paul Callaway door de politie van het kleine plaatsje Clark Falls, waar hij en zijn vrouw Sara een paar maanden eerder zijn komen te wonen, gearresteerd. Paul wordt beschuldigd van misbruik van zijn minderjarige buurmeisje. Terwijl hij weet dat hij onschuldig is.

Om zijn onschuld te bewijzen gaat Paul, ondanks dat hij wel een advocaat heeft, ook zelf op onderzoek uit. En ontdekt tot zijn verbijstering dat een van zijn buren, de bij alle andere buren zeer gerespecteerde oud-politieman Roger Mallory, een nogal dubieuze 'liefhebberij' heeft.

In principe zijn dit gegevens voor een spannende en daardoor boeiende thriller. Sean Doolittle is daar met De perfecte buren helaas niet in geslaagd. Ondanks het veelbelovende begin in het eerste hoofdstuk zijn de daaropvolgende hoofdstukken een lange opsomming van oninteressante wetenswaardigheden over Paul en Sara's buren.

Ongeveer halverwege het boek begint het verhaal wat boeiender te worden en komt er een heel klein beetje spanning om de hoek kijken. Veel te laat, en ook nog eens niet voldoende om er een echt goed boek van te maken.

Toch is er nog wel iets positiefs te melden over De perfecte buren. Het boek leest namelijk redelijk makkelijk. En het is Doolittle gelukt om de lezer toch nieuwsgierig te maken naar de afloop. Maar daar is dan ook alles mee gezegd.

Diane says

This book is an entertaining crime fiction novel about a couple, Paul and Sara Callaway, who move to a little midwestern town from the Northeast. They reside on a seemingly quiet cul-de-sac in a suburban neighborhood where everyone knows everybody else. One of the other major characters is Roger Mallory, a retired cop, who seems to know just about everything about all his neighbors. Very creepy!

Within a short period of time, Paul and Sara find out about the neighborhood's secrets, which include multiple murders, both past and present.

Unfortunately, the ending is a bit confusing and cramped, but it was a good, quick read.
