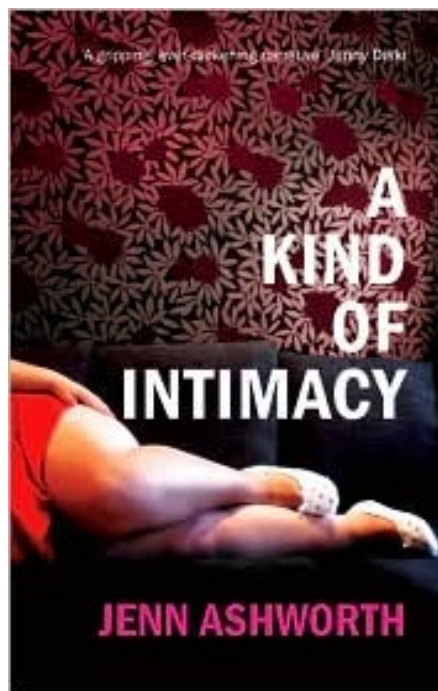




A Kind of Intimacy

Jenn Ashworth

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A Kind of Intimacy Jenn Ashworth

A darkly comic tale, 'A Kind of Intimacy' is an offbeat and ironic study of misunderstandings. It traces the dark possibilities of best intentions going awry, and gives an unsettling glimpse into a clumsy young woman who has too much in common with the rest of us to be written off as a monster.

A Kind of Intimacy Details

Date : Published September 1st 2009 by Arcadia Books (first published March 26th 2009)

ISBN : 9781906413064

Author : Jenn Ashworth

Format : Paperback 282 pages

Genre : Fiction, Contemporary, Mystery, Thriller, Novels

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From Reader Review A Kind of Intimacy for online ebook

Lee Marie says

This book so so well written, it's like I had Ashworth's character Annie sitting right next to me as I read. Annie's voice came through the pages so loudly it's like a I was getting punched in the face (in a good way of course), she was completely believable and not overdone like I was afraid was going to happen. She progressed slowly throughout the book, becoming more and more crazy and even more self obsessed and indulgent. I couldn't put this book down, I read it in just under two days and that is only because I had to work. I just had to see what next crazy thing Annie was going to do next. Well done, this is my top read of this year.

Ian says

This is the story of Annie, a morbidly obese woman who we meet moving into a new house in Fleetwood, Lancashire. She is clearly excited and looking forward to a new start in life after escaping from a previous unhappy relationship. Annie is the narrator and we almost immediately realise that she is suffering from mental health problems, as she comes to the instant delusion, after just one very brief meeting, that her next door neighbour Neil is secretly in love with her. She thus embarks on a campaign of intimidation towards his young partner Lucy with the aim of getting her to leave Neil, thus enabling him to fully embrace his hidden love for her.

The plot switches between the present day and the past, detailing Annie's current lonely existence and advancing creepy obsession with Neil and Lucy, and Annie's terribly loveless and abusive history is gradually exposed. I thought the present day narrative made for very uncomfortable reading as her behaviour worsened, but too often it was just a bit too slow and I also didn't quite believe in her relations with her other neighbours. The house warming party being a major case in point. I think this could have been improved by introducing more of Annie's history earlier as it put her behaviour into context.

Kirsty says

A Kind of Intimacy provided my first encounter with Jenn Ashworth's work. As well as being her first novel, this is also the first of my requests which came in at the local library. From the very beginning, Annie's narrative voice felt incredibly authentic; from this alone, the novel is a triumph. The whole has been cleverly written; Ashworth dangles a few carrots for the reader, which make the plot even more intriguing. As a character study, it is fascinating; as a novel, it is compelling and readable. So many unanswered questions come to light, and a definite tension grows palpably. To wrap up this short review, I couldn't stop reading, and the ending wowed me. *A Kind of Intimacy* is great and climactic, and whilst I didn't quite love it, it is a novel which I would highly recommend to all literary fiction fans.

Tonya says

Annie, as your narrator, takes you through her move to a new neighborhood and her quest to remake herself. She is obsessed with making things appear 'just so' and wants very badly to be friends with her neighbors.

What could go wrong?

We take a trip down memory lane occasionally and get bits of Annie's life growing up but the most engrossing parts of the book are her inner monologues and her reworking of a conversation she has just had with someone. We see her mind at work, we wonder how someone can do that, and then we wonder how many times we've rearranged our memories to fit how we wanted the experience to go? How much alike are we to Annie?

Without giving much away I have to recommend reading this book to anyone that lives or works in the world, partly because it is masterfully written and partly because there are more Annies out in the world than you would think.

Tom Middleton says

I am a 32 year old straight male. Needless to say this book is not aimed at me, but oh my god I am glad I read it. It was amazing.

A couple of girls that I work with had read it and after hearing them talk about it I was intrigued (it is lovingly referred to in the office as the 'Fat Girl Book'. I was told it was dark, but just how dark amazed me. It drew me in and I could not put it down. It was brilliant. The insanity of the book had me gripped from the first page. We cannot stop talking about it and I doubt we will for some time.

Sarah Obsesses over Books & Cookies says

Sort of like a variation of Fatal Attraction but even more delusional since there was no mutual attraction to begin with. I thought the ending kind of unravelled, even more so than the sad sap protagonist Annie was. An interesting readable story regardless. I liked that it was a book I'd never heard of before and I enjoyed taking the part of the mental head case woman who basically set me at ease; if I thought I had some issues, reading this made me take a breath and think, hmm okay maybe I'm more normal than I thought. Just a fantasy love story gone wrong.

Kristina says

This book is absolutely brilliant. Amazing. Disturbing. As soon as I'd breathlessly finished the last twenty pages or so, I wanted to start all over. Jenn Ashworth is a superb writer who manages to create a narrator who is as forceful and damaging as a hurricane, yet can also arouse feelings of sympathy (even if they are fleeting). *A Kind of Intimacy* is a fascinating and suspenseful portrait of a sociopath and the wreckage she creates around her when her fantastical reality intersects with other people's lives.

Annie Fairhurst is just moving into her new apartment in town when her neighbor, Neil, kindly offers to help her move some of her belongings. This brief, casual kindness on Neil's part sparks an unhealthy obsession with him. Annie, who lives in a delusional world in which another person's every gesture and word can be misconstrued to fit her reality, has decided that she and Neil have a romantic connection. The only obstacle to their happiness, she decides, is Lucy, Neil's live-in girlfriend. As Annie involves herself more deeply into the small community she moved into, her obsession with Neil grows. Neil, a generally kind man, is oblivious

to Annie's nasty tricks and subtle tormenting of Lucy. There's a sense of foreboding and holding one's breath because you know eventually Annie, who is not a patient woman, will eventually tire of waiting for Neil to remove Lucy from his life and take matters into her own hands.

The narrator of this book is Annie. All events are told solely from her perspective, but Ashworth is a very clever writer who manages to tell the reader that Annie's reality is twisted and not to be trusted. Annie is socially awkward and is unsure of how to behave in many social situations. She misreads a milkman's friendly morning greeting as a sexual come-on and Neil's offer to help her move some boxes as romantic interest. To help her navigate the world, Annie reads self-help books on almost every conceivable topic. She consciously mirrors others' gestures and facial expressions because she herself is not good at reading emotions, probably because she experiences only shallow, basic emotions. The relationships she attempts to form with others are valuable to her only so long as they are useful and can be manipulated by her. Once the relationship no longer benefits her, she discards it (her husband, Sangita).

Annie is at once disgusting and pathetic and her actions inspire sympathy mixed with repulsion. It's very easy to see how those who came into contact with her were fooled by her and wanted to help her. They felt sorry for her, probably genuinely liked her, and wanted to help her belong to their community. Reading some reviews of this book, it seems other readers also had this impression. I did not. I pegged Annie as disturbed right from the first sentence and was repulsed, horrified and fascinated as her actions (and delusions) grew more outrageous. I never felt sorry for her. Annie never feels sorry for herself (although she sometimes falsely encourages that feeling in others). She is most often proud of herself even if she does sometimes scold herself for her lapses (such as attempting to seduce the milkman). Some reviewers felt the author was "mean" by making Annie a very large woman, that Ashworth was somehow ridiculing or making a statement about large women. I didn't find this to be true. Annie's size is perhaps a symptom of her sociopathy—she is impulsive, she engages in unhealthy behavior, and she does not plan for the future. Annie likes to eat, so she eats. This is perhaps something that began in her childhood; we get glimpses of Annie's past and her upbringing seems to have been troubled. Annie is proud of her size and considers herself to be extremely attractive: "It's true, I am a large woman, although I'm very happy with my size, thank you very much, and true beauty, as we all know, comes from within" (32). There are actually only a few instances of other characters insulting Annie because of her size, but she's never very upset by it. When she overhears Lucy laughing about the size of her knickers ("as big as tents"), Lucy is angry. But her feelings aren't hurt neither is she ashamed. She's angry about being laughed at—the *why* doesn't matter. I'm also surprised to hear this book described as funny, because I didn't find any of it amusing. Annie is dead serious and to me, nothing she does is funny. Her social faux pas aren't laughable—they're repulsive and weird and indicative of a disturbed mind.

A Kind of Intimacy is an amazing book. Annie's voice is strident, unique, and very alive. She's the worst kind of nightmare because she doesn't understand how truly disturbed she is; her actions seem to her perfectly reasonable. Annie does not fully comprehend how she appears to others and consistently translates their gestures and conversations into whatever is pleasing to her. Only when confronted with reality she cannot deny (in the form of her in-laws) does she acknowledge that events are not as she wishes them to be. This is a very scary and plausible look into the deluded mind of a sociopath. If psychological thrillers appeal to you, this is a book you should read.

Carl Bromwich says

This first novel by Jenn Ashworth is a classic dark psychological thriller that takes you into the mind of an obsessive lonely obese woman. Imagine Abigail's Party crossed with Stephen King's Misery.

It is a frightening account of Annie who moves into a new house, a new area with new neighbours' her plan is to get to know them and leave her murky past behind; she has read all the self help literature, but the problem is Annie has a personality disorder and her delusions of love and romance lead to a terrifying climax. Ashworth is a brilliant writer and this really should be a best seller. Her descriptions of Annie's thoughts and world are first class.....

Unputadownable, this book is in my all time best 10 reads.

Nikki says

I feel like I read a totally different novel to other people, in the sense where I can't see any subtlety or indeed any novelty here. I feel like I've read the whole story before, partially because it's populated by stereotypes. Fat woman with tragic past has mental illness and struggles to integrate into society, quickly developing a one-sided "connection" and proceeding to act according to the rulebook for stalkers which must be out there somewhere. Reminded me of *Before I Go To Sleep* (S.J. Watson), *The Mermaids Singing* (Val McDermid)... and goodness knows what else.

I mean, I'm sure I've read this exact storyline in the newspaper or online at some point. I could predict every twist and turn. And what really confuses me is when someone recognises this and it somehow doesn't stop them really enjoying the book, like this Guardian reviewer: *'Its tone however remains with noirish cartoon, burlesque. This is disturbing. The "fat woman" stereotype grates. Evoking the pathos of an early loss, it unsettles the humour without deepening the story's empathy. Annie's long history of sexual abuse, her self-marketing to the "fat porn" industry, possible infanticide and low self-estimate are equally disturbing... Yet who wouldn't kill for a comic gift like Jenn Ashworth's? Laugh-out-loud humour is outrageous and prodigal, especially in the ensemble dinner-party scene and the suspenseful final chapters.'*

Yep, and at least half the humour revolves around her being fat, socially awkward, and clearly mentally ill. Hooray for ableist, fat-shaming social norms, amirite?

Carys says

I started reading the book on a Saturday morning and finished it by teatime: it was a book that I couldn't put down. I watched 'Notes on a Scandal' recently and the comparison that Alison Flood makes between the two stories is apt, although I found 'A Kind of Intimacy' more terrifying, which probably had something to do with Annie's age: twenty eight is young to be so damaged.

'A Kind of Intimacy' was especially disquieting because of Annie's humanity – her nervousness in social situations, her desire to make friends, her faux pas and her reliance on the advice of self help books all engender empathy – the reader is torn between liking Annie and despising her, between understanding and disgust, between pity and anger. I attended one of Jenn's readings which was extremely entertaining and as a result I expected the book to be much funnier than it was, however it was intriguing and intense and I didn't feel in any way cheated when I reached the end.

After I finished the book I carried the residue of it with me for the rest of the evening. I was disquieted, uneasy; I felt stirred up and slightly jumbly. I like a book that does that to me; a book that makes me think, knocks me for six, picks me up and gives me a good shake.

Cara says

This book kept me up till the wee small hours as I just couldn't put it down until I had finished it! Jenn Ashworth lulls you into a false sense of security at the beginning, introducing us to Annie who has just moved into a new house and is getting to know her neighbours. Gradually you begin to realise that things aren't quite right but you can't put your finger on exactly why this is. At first you feel some sympathy or pity for Annie; she has obviously been through some kind of traumatic event, but as the book progresses and her behaviour becomes more erratic and unhinged, a sense of foreboding creeps in. What is Annie up to? What is she going to do? What exactly happened to her? The conclusion answers all these questions but nothing can prepare you for the final denouement which is shocking but very well written.

I thoroughly enjoyed A Kind of Intimacy and found myself totally engrossed in Annie's world, constantly trying to second guess her rationale (but getting it completely wrong). It is a very disturbing book in some ways... do we *really* know the people who live around us? The twist, when it comes, makes all that has come before fall into place but will have you gasping in shock nonetheless. A highly recommended read

Blair says

This deliciously creepy and insinuating novel, Jenn Ashworth's debut, is the story of Annie Fairhurst - as told by this fascinating, contradictory and wholly unreliable character herself. We meet Annie, who is seriously overweight and struggles to interact with others, as she moves - alone - into a new neighbourhood. At first Annie seems to be a fairly ordinary, if rather sad, character. She is lonely, with no family, and appears to have a traumatic past; she is desperate to make friends with her new neighbours, but is completely misguided in how she goes about this, relying heavily on the clichéd and outdated advice of self-help books. She also develops an infatuation with the man next door, Neil - who has a beautiful young girlfriend - almost immediately. But very quickly, it becomes apparent that Annie is unbalanced and her account cannot be trusted. As her crush on Neil grows into an obsession, and she becomes convinced of a dangerous rivalry with his girlfriend Lucy, Annie's behaviour spirals into a series of increasingly bizarre incidents - all seen through the warped lens of her own disturbed mind.

There were points when I did wonder if the plot could have been more subtle. I think, for example, the story might have worked better if Ashworth had established Annie as an honest, trustworthy and likeable character and revealed her true nature at a slower pace; if she had played with the reader's perceptions more. Instead, the reader knows within the first couple of chapters that Annie is both disturbed and dishonest. But the method of delivery is effective, as the protagonist intermittently delves into scenes from her past that gradually allow her audience to piece together the reasons for her present situation. It must have taken tremendous effort to maintain the style throughout - relating everything in Annie's distinctive voice, so naive and out of touch with her surroundings yet so subtly menacing, while also clearly communicating the reality of each incident to the reader. There are shocking developments - the seedy secrets of Annie's past could easily seem bizarrely out of sync with her delusions about Neil and Lucy's relationship - but somehow, in context, these work, perhaps because for most of the book Ashworth manages to balance Annie's madness and her humanity with enviable skill.

While Annie can't exactly be called a sympathetic character - her deviance is hinted at too heavily from the very beginning - the power of Ashworth's writing lies in the way she's taken traits many lonely people will identify with and exaggerated them to a wince-inducing degree. The modification and embellishment of one's past during conversations; the disproportionate emphasis placed on small encounters with someone you find attractive; the over-enthusiastic celebration of new potential friendships; the descent from healthy eating, to microwave meals, to piles of snacks eaten in bed. While it's difficult to *like* Annie, it's equally impossible not to feel sorry for her and, at points, to feel like you're on her side. This is emphasised by the

fact that there are many shades of grey in the earlier half of the novel - Annie is not 'bad' and the other characters 'good'. Lucy isn't likeable, and is unpleasant towards Annie from the beginning for no reason other than her weight and the fact that she doesn't immediately fit in - which of us that's ever felt 'different' can't identify with that? Sangita does seem two-faced, Raymond is horrible and Will is boring and suffocating. None of this excuses Annie's eventual actions or explains her distorted perspective, but it does help to portray her as a painfully human character.

A Kind of Intimacy is an ideal companion piece to one of my favourite books of the year - Ross Raisin's *God's Own Country* - and in many ways, Annie is the female equivalent of Raisin's Sam Marsdyke. Both books start out as a portrayal of a lonely, isolated young person with a murky past and a suggested history of violence; both see said character developing an obsessive and delusional infatuation with a neighbour; both build to a quite terrifying climax, and end (view spoiler). I'm certainly glad I read this after Ashworth's inferior sophomore novel, *Cold Light* - if I'd read *A Kind of Intimacy* first, my expectations would have been sky-high for any follow-up. This book has its flaws (it occasionally flounders slightly), but it's extraordinarily powerful and darkly funny throughout, and so much of the story has really stuck in my head since I finished it. A worthy addition to my collection of favourite unreliable narrators.

Rachel says

A few weeks ago, after realizing that many of the books I read have the common thread of a plot I probably wouldn't want to talk about in mixed company, I added a "criminals or tremendous creepers" shelf tag. It features *American Psycho*, Ann Rule, necrophilia, Nazis, a disturbingly high number of pedophiles, and now, this book. *A Kind of Intimacy* certainly belongs in the category, but it makes me uncomfortable on a level quite different from the other books on the shelf.

Its protagonist, Annie Fairhurst, is the ultimate unreliable narrator. Newly single and freshly moved into a new home, she convinces herself that her cute next door neighbor Neil is secretly in love with her and aching to break up with his beautiful young girlfriend, Lucy. She proceeds to read his every smile as full of desire, every refusal to look at her as nervousness or modesty rather than disinterest. His "reluctance" to break up with Lucy, she tells herself, proves that he's just a nice guy who "wants to do it right."

I don't know about you, but failure to interpret body language correctly ranks high on my scale of mutual discomfort. I can't stand to see a person forge ahead seductively when the other party is telling them no in myriad ways. And this is what Annie does. All of a sudden she's whipped her breasts out of her dress, thinking that Neil wants this to happen (!) and it's a squirmy *trainwreck*. But you're reading this wreck from her perspective, and you're seeing the way she rationalizes her behavior as the right thing to do in the moment, so there's some degree of sympathy for her too, even as she commits small acts of vandalism and is in such denial about them that she is genuinely surprised when accused.

Then there's the ending. The book, once something of a tragedy, makes good on its "dark comedy" description in its final chapters. The epilogue and the pages of action that precede it read like Ashworth realized she'd gone on a little long without bringing this whole thing around to catharsis and overshot the crazy by forty meters as a make-up. No, thank you. I'd probably love a good snowglobe as weapon scene or rage! mirror shattering at the end of another book, but Annie's sociopathic tendencies up until this point had been pathetic, not funny. I know, I know: *books with plots* need climaxes. This one's over the top.

Jasmine says

This book is about a crazy person, and I don't mean a little bit of a crazy person a super crazy person. Say hello to Annie, weirdly my mother's name is also annie, perhaps that is not weird. Annie has a crazy father, and from what I can tell had an extremely loving husband up until she went and fucked that up too. *No totally seriously her husband seems like a really great guy who is willing to put up with basically anything as long as he get to be with her. She is totally unappreciative of that.* Annie is socially, well inept would be the nice way to put it. Lets go with schizotypal perhaps. Certainly sociopathic.

~~Regardless lets talk about the book, or at least pretend to. Basically I read the summary of this book and decided certain events had occurred, then 2/3s of the way through the book was worried that such events actually hadn't occurred, reread the jacket seeing it said nothing of these events. But no worries all eventually everything I was expecting to happen in this book did and I enjoyed every moment of it.~~

The book is a bit of an experiment in character development, the Annie you meet in the first few pages is not the same Annie that you walk away from the book with. Part of the problem being a completely unreliable narration that forces you to question everything that has occurred in the entire book. It is very clear that Annie is telling the entire story after the fact and seeing how by the end you are forced to question everything that she says it is hard to know what to think about the entire book. There were moments when I just couldn't tell what was going on at all. But in the end I enjoyed it and it all turned out for the best.

Here is a toast to another great British attempt to humanize the criminal mind. Although a comparatively much more creepy one.

addendum:

I have decided that this review is complete crap and it isn't that I am trying to float it just that I think I completely missed some of the very important points of the book.

This book is about people I find generally disgusting, basically a morbidly obese person who thinks that is super sexy, or what she says is "some men like that". In her social ineptitude she fails to mention the men she knows that like that have creepy feeder fetishes(I mean these are basically as creepy if not worse than furry fetishes), I am not sure she is aware of this. This leads to part of the creepiness of the book. Several times Annie talks about how she is so good in social situations and explains how other events have lead to her talent. This talent manifests as her cutting herself on purpose and hiding in the kitchen during her party, and believing next door neighbors who are in happy relationships are completely in love with her. Social talents my ass.

Okay I don't know if I am done yet, but I feel much better about this review now.

AdiTurbo says

DNF. I'm not enjoying this. I see where it is going, and I don't see anything original here or anything relevant to me. I'm not happy about the way the protagonist is portrayed, and I feel that there may be something exploitative in this novel about the use of child abuse as an explanation for how the main character behaves. Not for me.

Anne says

This was really quite a read! Annie has a highly murky past, slowly revealed throughout her narration, and her voice is strong and highly endearing. When she moves into a new house next door to Neil and Lucy, she does her utmost to try and fit in - the housewarming party is a wonderful piece of writing - but you slowly pick up that everything is not as it should be. It's written so well - because Annie's the narrator you only get her version of events, and you can't help but like her, but the truth about what's going on slowly surfaces. I won't spoil it by telling you any more about how the story develops, or about Annie's past, but it's a real shocker and the last 50 pages or so are quite brilliant. Loved it.

Book Riot Community says

This was an enjoyably dark book that takes readers into the mind of a seriously warped woman. Narrator Annie moves into a new home and almost immediately becomes attached to her neighbor, Will. Her obsession leads to aggressive acts against his girlfriend, Lucy. It's evident that Annie has some secrets in her past and that the story she presents to her neighbors (and her readers) isn't entirely accurate. As the nature of her past is revealed, the big looming question is, What will Annie do next? I recommend this for fans of *Notes on a Scandal* or anyone who enjoys books with narrators who aren't quite right.

—Teresa Preston

from The Best Books We Read In July 2016: <http://bookriot.com/2016/08/01/riot-r...>

Nick Turner says

Along with Mr Tips, her cat, and a collection of novelty mugs, suburban *single white female* Annie hopes to leave behind her troubled past by moving to a new house. Annie has some anger issues.

My hands started to hurt again and I looked at them, surprised at the grazes on my knuckles. I'd been hitting the wall above the pedal bin with my fists, over and over without realising it.

But what can one do if the neighbours are simply beastly?

'Have you seen the size of her?' said Lucy, and laughed again. 'She's massive!'

'Come on, don't be cruel,' Neil said mildly, and I was grateful.

'Throw her knickers over?' Lucy giggled. 'I've seen them on the line: like bloody parachutes. tents! Duvet covers! She must get them specially made!'

But not Neil, Annie's knight in shining armour, if she recalls correctly. But Neil is living with callow Lucy. She doesn't deserve him! Somebody should do something about that, or so Annie feels.

An impressive discomfiting first novel.

Is the story sympathetic enough to the main character? Giving no voice (literally, or in the narrative) to a transgressive actor is a common frustration. Here, this is avoided by telling the story in the first person.

When the self-serving self-deceiving tone of the narrator becomes evident is there any sympathy left? Can we readers delude ourselves that things could have worked out differently for Annie if only (view spoiler)?

Maggie Walsh says

I love this book. It took me a few chapters to get into but once you start to get the gist of the story its totally addictive.

Its the story of Annie, a 29yr old woman who moves into a new house and forms a belief that she has met her neighbour Neil before and tries to develop a friendship with him must to the distaste of his girlfriend Lucy.

As the book goes on you realise there is more to this woman than meets the eye and that maybe her perception of life is different to what is really going on.

I can't tell anymore without giving the plot away but this book was just wonderful. Jenn Ashworth really gets under your skin and its a book that stays with you long after you put it down.

Anne says

What a fantastic novel, I'm sure this one will be up there in my Top Ten of the year.

Annie is such an intriguing character - and one of the most unreliable narrators I've ever come across. At times she comes across as an innocent, naive, misunderstood and quite loveable, it is only as the reader gets further into the story that the darkness descends and so the little flashes of Annie's interior character are exposed.

There are incidents that are so funny; Annie's house-warming party and the dinner party being just two of them, almost toe-curling just to read them. Jenn Ashworth certainly has a sharp wit and is able to translate that to the page so well.

Annie is looking for love, pure and simple, that's all that she wants, but she wants it to be a fairy-tale love affair. She's read all the self-help books, she knows what she is supposed to do, but Annie attracts the wrong sort of guy.

The story follows Annie through her marriage and motherhood until she finds herself alone again, living next door to Neil and his beautiful young girlfriend. This is when the suspense starts. Annie's fixation on Neil, her ability to convince herself that he loves her and her determination to be happy is her downfall.

The suspense of the last 70 pages or so is breathtaking, the writing is wonderful, the darkness, the humour, the horror - all balanced finely to make a fantastic read.
