

The New Neighbours by Sarah McIntyre

[Young Readers]



I've long been in love with McIntyre's exuberant craft, and here she delivers a big bundle of wit and wisdom which wraps its warm heart around the welcoming of strangers. There's a doormat on the cover for *just* such a purpose as Sarah invites you in for tea, cake and quite the cacophony...

"Guess what!" shouted Piper. "We have RATS in our flats!"

They really do, and the young bunnies are beyond all containment!

"RATS!" "We've got RATS!" "WAHEY!" "YIPPEE!"

They bounce down from the rooftop and into each flat like big rubber balls. Brick towers tumble, a game of draughts is disabled and someone's stuffed their head right into an upended saucepan of spaghetti! You can't really blame them: it looks *very* tasty. There's so much foreground *and* background detail for wide eyes to discover. Look at the family portrait: bunnies *do* love to breed!

Their elder sister Lettuce is the first they encounter. She considers this development and responds with that which is right: "Hmm... RATS! I've never lived with RATS before... We should go and say hi."





Of *course* they should! So off they all hop down the stairs again. But their next neighbour Vern casts one note of *slight* caution: “I don’t think rats are very tidy neighbours. We need to make sure they keep the place clean. Let’s gather everyone in the building and figure out what to do.”

And that seems okaaaaaay, but without giving too much awaaaaaay... This is the crossroads. This is where natural excitement, enthusiasm and inquisitiveness begin to descend from “I don’t think” and “I am not sure” into accumulated, ill-informed gossip. The Pigs accuse rats of being messy, while their own pots and pans pile up unwashed in the sink. Further floors are inhabited by animals from all over the globe – like polar bears and buffalo bison – adored by each other now that they are *established* neighbours. But what of the brand-new arrivals whose put-about reputation precedes them...? First rats are untidy, then they are dirty and finally they supposedly steal! “Would they steal my teddy too?”

Slowly the stairwell grows darker, more crowded, and each time more animals join in Sarah adds an extra verb: “Everyone HOPPED and TROTTED and TOTTERED...” The lettering is so well integrated on the pages within the steps themselves: TROTTED and TOTTERED are bigger and bolder than the other words, their individual letters bobbing up and down like visual onomatopoeia.



“Everyone HOPPED and TROTTED and TOTTERED and PADDED and CLATTERED downstairs...” until they tumble, tripped up by their own unnecessary panic, into one chaotic heap on the floor.

But who’s going to knock on the door? No one dares! I’ll leave the final reveal to Sarah, but you can rest assured that there will be much contrite, sticky egg on many embarrassed faces!

McIntyre has eschewed her usual bold pen lines and dazzling colours as seen in GRUMPY CORN for watercolour pencils which are fabulous for bunny fur and a more comforting feel throughout, along with pastel shades for a carefully controlled atmosphere which subtly shifts as everyone gets so worked up over nothing. There’s a vivid sense of shared community and a rich harmony which will be restored, I promise! You can sense the rejuvenation of spirits on the final spread where – for almost the first time since the opening rooftop – you can finally see daylight again, flooding in from outside.

Now *that* is so very, very clever.

Also recommended by Sarah McIntyre: everything she’s ever done.

Additional Resources: Families, schools and even older students studying their craft can all benefit from [Sarah McIntyre’s website](#) where you’ll find activity sheets etc, plus her regularly updated, lavishly illustrated [Livejournal](#) wherein she offers a wealth of personal experience and encouragement to all.

Lastly, I love this book so much that we made a short film of me performing it for [LittleLICAF / LICAF Live](#) which you can see here: <https://youtu.be/GOy5lqigE10> It’s a little longer and more in-depth than this edited review plus, I kid you not, done in one take. So that was a thing.