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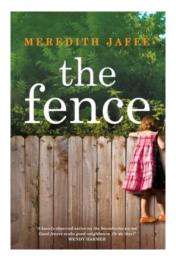
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The Fence Meredith Jaffé Macmillan Stars: 4 Reviewed by Thuy On Released September 2016 Trade paperback ISBN 9781743540152 RRP \$32.99 Category: fiction

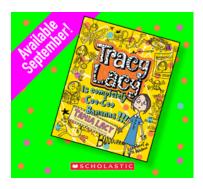
The Fence (Meredith Jaffé, Macmillan)

28 July 2016

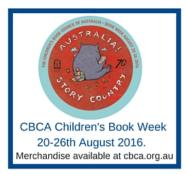
Septuagenarian Gwen and husband Eric are long-term residents of Green Valley Avenue, a quiet leafy corner in Sydney. When her beloved friend next-door dies, and her house is put on sale. Gwen is apprehensive about the incoming neighbours. And indeed first impressions and enduring interactions with the newbies are not favourable. Francesca and Brandon and their tribe of children (dazzlingly named twins Silver and Amber, Marigold and baby Bijoux) and dogs (Peanut and Butter) are noisy and destructive. But worse than that, for safety reasons Frankie and Brandy insist on the instalment of a fence between their two properties. Hitherto the two houses were separated by a row of trees, and Gwen, a keen gardener, believes the young upstarts are ecoterrorists, hell-bent on destroying her life's work but Frankie and Brandy think she's just an interfering busybody. The Fence's North Shore real estate squabbles are reminiscent of the fiction of Liane Moriarty, but Meredith Jaffé's debut explores a range of topics beyond mere border patrol disputes. Written with astute characterisation and alternating viewpoints so the reader can sympathise with both sides, The Fence also explores gender roles at home and work; marital and parental friction; the generational divide and the indignities of ageing. It's an engaging and satirical novel about the struggle of whether to preserve the past or look to the future.

Thuy On is a Melbourne-based arts journalist and book reviewer and books editor of The Big Issue

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