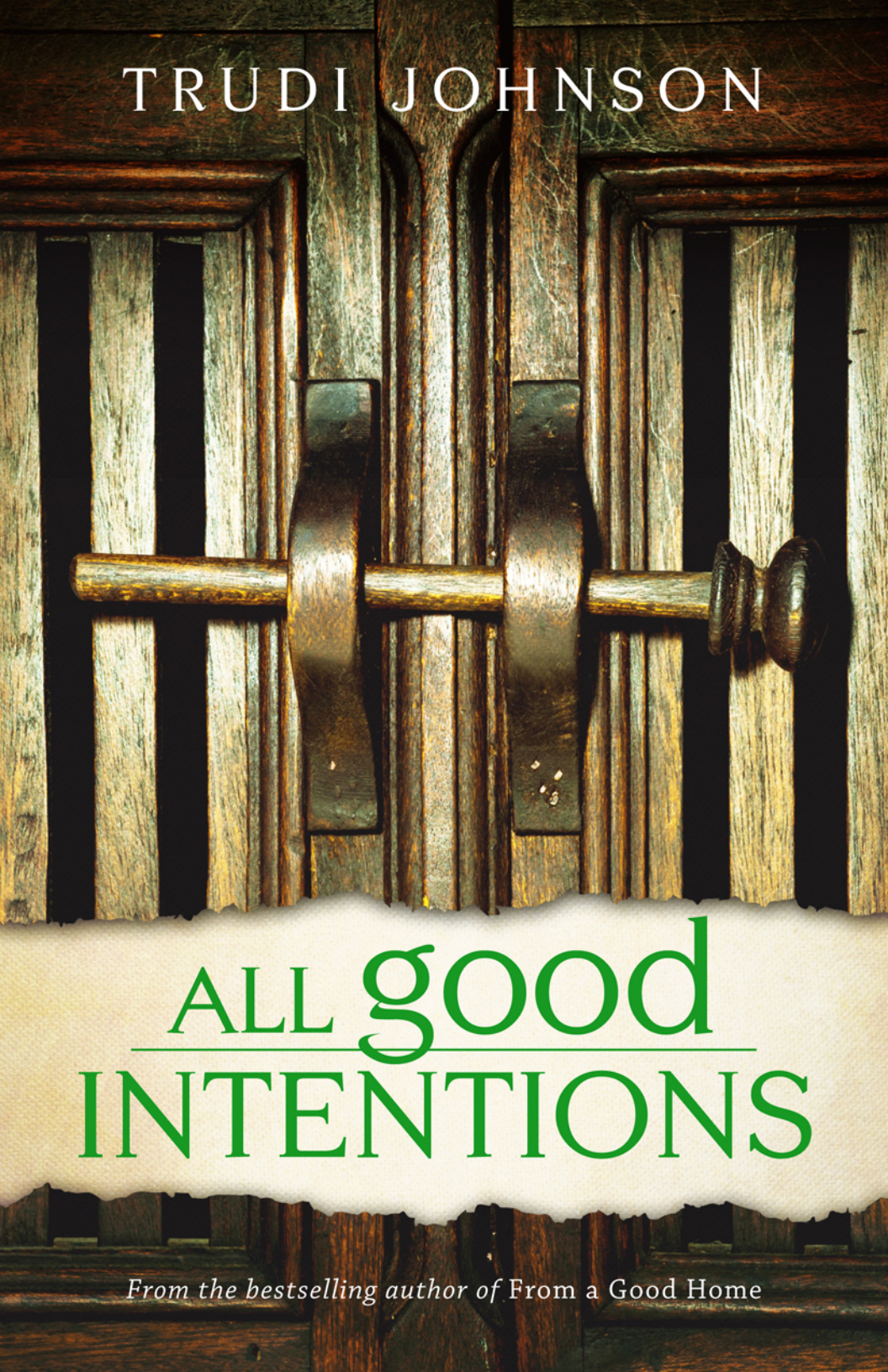




TRUDI JOHNSON

ALL good
INTENTIONS

From the bestselling author of From a Good Home

ALL good

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A NOVEL

TRUDI JOHNSON

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We acknowledge the [financial] support of the Government of Canada. *Nous reconnaissons l'appui [financier] du gouvernement du Canada.* We acknowledge the support of the Canada Council for the Arts, which last year invested \$153 million to bring the arts to Canadians throughout the country. *Nous remercions le Conseil des arts du Canada de son soutien. L'an dernier, le Conseil a investi 153 millions de dollars pour mettre de l'art dans la vie des Canadiennes et des Canadiens de tout le pays.* We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, Department of Tourism, Culture and Recreation for our publishing activities.

For my parents

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The past is never dead. It's not even past. All of us labour in webs spun long before we were born, webs of heredity and environment, of desire and consequence, of history and eternity.

— William Faulkner

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THE FAMILIES

Steffensen Family

Kurt Steffensen – businessman, owner of Steffensen Publishing and Printing

Jaclyn Peters – artist and Kurt's second wife

Joe Steffensen – architect and son of Kurt Steffensen and Jeanne Sinclair

Lauren Steffensen – lawyer and daughter of Kurt Steffensen and Jeanne Sinclair

Alan Matheson – writer and husband of Lauren Steffensen

Catherine and Christian Steffensen – parents of Kurt Steffensen

Jeanette – sister of Kurt Steffensen

Sinclair Family

Charles Sinclair – Water Street businessman, patriarch of the Sinclair family, deceased

Jeanne Sinclair – daughter of Charles Sinclair and Hannah Parsons West

Emily Sinclair – daughter of Charles Sinclair and Virginia Boland Sinclair

Gregory Sinclair – physician, son of Emily Sinclair

Martel Family

Steven Martel – civil engineer

Lindsay Martel – retired teacher

Sandi Martel – professor, daughter of Steven and Lindsay Martel
Jordy Martel – graduate student, son of Steven and Lindsay Martel

West Family

Hannah Parsons West – mother of Jeanne Sinclair
Carrie West – clergy, daughter of Hannah West and Marshall West

Boland Family

Clarence Boland – businessman, son of Royston Boland; deceased
Dora Boland – wife of Clarence Boland, deceased
Lucinda Boland – daughter of Royston Boland, deceased

THE FRIENDS

Quentin Henderson – Steffensen family lawyer
Jonathan Hamlyn – Sinclair family lawyer
Kevin Gillis – land developer
Edgar Gillis – father of Kevin Gillis, deceased
Doris McKinlay – executive assistant to Kurt Steffensen
Sara Russell – naval engineer
David Gilchrist – physician
Caroline Kavanagh – close friend of Jeanne Sinclair
Brittany Kavanagh – daughter to Caroline and George Kavanagh
Alva Green – employee of the Sinclair family for many years; friend
of Hannah West

CHAPTER 1

APRIL 1996, FALCON COVE, NL

“The ice is staying late this year,” Hannah observed, as she stood by her horizontal rocker and looked out at the bay through the wood-framed window in her kitchen.

Jeanne nodded. “A poor spring.”

“The wind was westerly on Good Friday, though,” Hannah added, with a nervous chuckle. “Marshall used to say that was the sign of a warm summer ahead.”

The two women, mother and daughter, had been sitting in an uncomfortable silence for several minutes, each wondering where to begin, or if to begin at all. Neither had planned for this day, and neither knew what to expect.

For Jeanne, the long day was beginning to take its toll. Early in the morning, she had packed some warm casual clothes and left her home in St. John's. She was not used to highway driving, and the four-hour journey was tiring. Midway, she pulled into a service station seemingly in the middle of nowhere. She was glad she'd worn her long woollen coat, because, when she got out of the car the wind was biting. She chose a cup of coffee to keep her alert, although it was not a drink she favoured. After three sips she continued her drive, more anxious about the outcome with each passing kilometre.

Hannah had anticipated a typical Easter Sunday in Falcon Cove,

a small community on the northeast coast of the island. As was her tradition, she had donned her new coat and walked to Bethel United Church for the morning service. Carrie, her other daughter, was the minister there. Halfway through the service, when the members of the congregation were asked to greet each other, she had turned around and seen Jeanne, an encounter that left her momentarily breathless. They had not spoken or seen each other since the birth of Jeanne's son, thirty-five years ago.

Now, in the evening, once supper dishes had been cleared, they sat opposite each other in Hannah's kitchen.

Jeanne adjusted the floral cushions in the Windsor chair by the kitchen table and tried to get comfortable. The calendar above the sink said spring had arrived, but nothing in her line of vision outdoors supported it. She could see ice floes being pushed into the entrance of the harbour by the gusting northeast wind and rising tide. The deep bay beyond was dotted with icebergs glistening in the setting sun.

Hannah drank her cup of tea, although by now it was cold. She laid her cup on the table beside her and nervously searched for words that she hoped would not make her daughter uncomfortable. She wanted to know so much but feared the answers. "Jeanne, I've wondered . . ."

"Yes?"

"Did Charles suffer long before he passed away?" Her throat tightened.

"No, less than a month." She was surprised by the question. "He knew what was coming. The doctors were candid. Father told me that everything was in order and that the house, the Sinclair house, would be mine. That's what he said." Her voice quivered. "I'll never forget those last few days. I relive every moment over in my mind. The hardest thing about life is that it ends."

Hannah took a deep breath, brushed away a stray tear with her handkerchief, and tucked it in the cuff of her woollen cardigan. To try to rid her mind of painful thoughts, she reached for a ball of grey wool in the small knitting stand next to her chair. Following a pattern for socks found only in her head, she took the double-pointed needles and continued where she'd left off. "When I was growing up,

we weren't allowed to knit on Sundays," she commented. "Or do much else, for that matter."

"Neither were we," Jeanne responded.

"Now every day is alike." She pulled on the wool to loosen it from the ball. "You had a little girl after Joe."

"Yes, three years later. Lauren. She's a lawyer now." Jeanne welcomed the heat rising from the baseboard heater next to her feet. She watched the rhythmic action of Hannah's knitting and, like Hannah, searched for words. "I'm looking forward to the snow melting," she said, "so I can start my gardening. Of course, that's at least several months away yet."

"Carrie's good at gardening," Hannah said, without looking up. "But it's difficult to grow much here. The soil's not good and the weather's poor. Carrie tries a few vegetables. Last year she had a wonderful crop of carrots. I guess you have a big garden in St. John's."

"I plant mostly reliable flowers that I know can handle the weather. From time to time, I take a chance on something different." Jeanne looked at the knitting basket. A rolled crossword puzzle book was tucked in among the balls of wool, with a pencil sticking out of it. "You do crosswords?"

"Yes, although I'm not very good at them."

"Neither am I, but I try. They say it's good for the mind. Kurt enjoys them," she explained. "When we were married, he'd do the *New York Times* crossword on Sunday evenings."

Hannah detected pride in her voice. "He's a publisher, so he should be good at crosswords," she said, with a broad smile, and they both laughed, a little less uneasy.

The old-fashioned analog clock sitting on the counter next to the stove ticked away the minutes of the evening. Jeanne studied the room, being careful not to give the impression that she was judging each item. She pushed up the sleeves of her green cashmere sweater, looked at her nails, and made a mental note to book a manicure when she returned to St. John's. The lone street light just outside the kitchen window caught her attention. In the shadows, two figures walked by and waved. Jeanne returned the greeting, although she didn't know who they were.

Hannah stood to flip on the light switch by the door frame and returned to her chair and her knitting. After a moment or two, she nestled the grey wool in her lap. Words that had played in her mind for years were suddenly spoken for the first time, spurred by a flicker of courage from deep within. "I never thought I'd see you again," she said, almost in a whisper.

"To be honest, I never thought I would be here," Jeanne responded, just as quietly.

"What made you decide?"

Jeanne gave a long sigh. "It's difficult to say. After Father passed away last August and the estate was settled, everyone in the family knew about you, so there was no longer a need . . . I mean . . . I decided to see you, if I could."

Like her daughter, Hannah was afraid to commit to a conversation that brought out such stinging emotion. Instead, she said, "Charles must have found it lonely once Virginia passed away. They were married for almost sixty years."

"I suppose, but to be honest, Hannah, they were never very close." Jeanne rested her elbow on the windowsill and her head in her hand. "What do you remember about her?"

"When I knew her, Virginia was in her twenties. She and Charles were a young couple with a little one, two-year-old Emily, just starting out." She looked away, deep in reflection. The memories flooded back. "Virginia was never friendly to the staff. We were there to do as she pleased, that's all. She had beautiful clothes, though, that much I do remember. It was all bought up in Canada in the summertime. I'd never seen anything like them. Alva Green, the housekeeper, and I would lay out clothes for her on special occasions. Such lovely dresses." She drew a shallow breath. "You knew Virginia as your mother for a long time."

Jeanne shifted in her chair. "Until I was twenty-three. On my wedding day she told me the truth."

"Your wedding day?" Hannah's eyes widened in disbelief.

"Yes, just before I left for the church," she explained, and pushed away the memory. "When I think about her now, I see a very different person than I saw when I was just a young girl."

"How so?"

"When I was growing up, Virginia was always organized, so neat and tidy. I thought we were all supposed to be that way. Now when I look back, I think it was an obsession for her. It seemed that everything in her life was kept in a box. Her emotions and her clothing," she explained. "She always seemed sad. She had little regard for Kurt or our children. To be honest, I have no recollection of Father and Virginia ever being happy together. They were separated even while they were living together, if you know what I mean. I think they just tolerated each other."

"A difficult way to go through life," Hannah remarked, her pursed lips indicating her disgust. "But not uncommon." She rested her hands in the knitting. "The beautiful Sinclair house? Is it empty now?"

"Yes, unfortunately it is. Selling it seems like letting go of him . . . and I can't do that . . . yet."

From across the room, Hannah could detect the sadness in her eyes. Knowing that Carrie would be home soon, she chose to tell Jeanne privately what she had always wanted to say. Swallowing hard, she managed, "I didn't want to leave, Jeanne. It was hard. I had no choice." Her words were barely audible.

"It's okay. You need not explain. This is as painful for me to hear as it is for you to say," Jeanne assured her. "Let's not . . ."

Hannah nodded, her throat raw as she fought back regret that had been tamped down for many years.

No. I cannot go there. She cannot go there. There are no words. And so, as she was always so capable of doing, Jeanne regrouped. She crossed one leg over the other. "Is this your favourite room? The kitchen? You have quite the view through each window." Her voice was now clear and full.

Hannah smiled, and turned her knitting to begin another row. "I can see all the goings-on in the harbour from this window. Carrie says I shouldn't spy on people, but I'm just seeing what's happening, 'tis all."

Jeanne laughed. She thought that if she lived in this house, this would be her favourite room as well. Hannah's voice, she realized for the first time, sounded so much like her own. She wondered what else they had in common.

Hannah glanced at the clock and dropped her knitting into the basket. "Carrie will be home from church soon," she noted. "I must put on the kettle."

Jeanne smiled as she watched her fuss over tea. She tried to imagine the life this woman had lived. Hannah had left Falcon Cove at the age of seventeen in 1935 to work in service with the Sinclair family in St. John's. In the two years of her employment, she had had a relationship with Jeanne's father, the head of the household, and left, having given birth to Jeanne in June of 1937. Charles and Virginia raised her and, to the community, she was Virginia's daughter. Until Jeanne's wedding day. Jeanne had never forgotten the words that Virginia spoke to her that day. As she stood in front of a mirror adjusting her veil, Virginia, behind her, had announced, "You should know that I am not your mother. Your mother is Hannah Parsons. She worked for us many years ago." Then she sharply turned away, leaving Jeanne standing in shock fingering her veil and processing her words.

Now, here they were, mother and daughter. Although their lives had been so different, they held one strong connection: Charles Sinclair. Each woman clung to warm memories of him that only she could understand.

Outside, a few minutes away, Carrie fought the wind as she hurried down the hill from the church. She rounded the corner to Parsons' Lane that led to their home with her mind on the Easter service that morning, a service she would not soon forget. Seeing Jeanne sitting in the middle of the sanctuary had caused her to temporarily lose her place in the order of service. Carrie had met Jeanne in St. John's a month before when she'd finally mustered up enough courage to visit her home. She'd also met Jeanne's son, Joe, and her daughter, Lauren, who seemed so glad to meet her and looked forward to meeting their grandmother. At the time, it seemed pleasant, but once Carrie returned to Falcon Cove, she wondered how much their lives would change as a result of that meeting. More than anything, she worried about the toll this would have on her mother.

She paused and looked up at the white two-storey house with its window flower boxes waiting for summer. For the first time, she felt

like an outsider in her own home and was hesitant to enter. Patches of snow were tucked in crevices by the bridge that received no sun. *What brought you here now, Jeanne?* But it was a question Carrie dared not ask. She opened the back door and called out that she was home. For the next two hours, the three women made pleasant conversation.

Shortly after 10:00 p.m., Carrie turned restlessly in bed and listened as the freezing rain lashed against her bedroom window and the house creaked in the wind. She gazed at the lights of the community sparkling in the distance, her mind fixed on Jeanne and the new family members who were about to invade her life and Hannah's. She wasn't sure if she wanted to take it on, and she felt guilty for feeling that way. Which emotion was more difficult to handle? Apprehension or guilt?

In the spare bedroom at the end of the hall, Jeanne tucked the plaid flannel sheet and pink woollen blanket under her chin and recalled every word of her conversation with Hannah that evening. "A memory," she whispered aloud, with a smile. *My first with my mother in a very long time.*

But in the darkness and the unfamiliarity of the room, Jeanne wondered if the emotion she felt tonight would be only fleeting.

* * * * *

JUNE 1996, ST. JOHN'S, NL

No man should ever have to eat yogourt. Kevin Gillis turned his tablespoon to push back the white creamy mixture from atop the tall stemmed glass of fresh fruit. Once the strawberries and peaches were no longer touching the yogourt, he scooped them up. The Cabot Club, Hotel Newfoundland's dining room, was unusually quiet that Friday morning, just the way he preferred it. He poured hot coffee from the silver decanter into the white china cup, sat back, and flipped the newspaper to reveal the stories under the fold. His eyes caught the latest story on oil development off the coast of Newfoundland and its potential impact on the province, particularly the capital city, St. John's. He noted that one name in particular was mentioned as some-

one who knew the region's potential. Kurt Steffensen. It was the second time in as many days that he'd read about the province's being on the brink of prosperity, a far cry from the days of gloom and doom that he recalled his father talk about many years ago. He scanned the story, reached for another spoonful of fruit, this time a combination of pineapple and melon. He ignored the yogourt that had fallen off the top and was slowly running down the side and staining the black linen napkin on the side plate.

He reached for his black leather case laid on the cushioned chair next to him. Unzipping the top, he pulled out the envelope containing several land deeds. *Who would have ever thought that such vacant pieces of land, good for very little, would finally be valuable?* Or, at least, he hoped they would.

He placed the envelope back in the case and took out three file folders behind it. He laid aside the first one; it contained a business proposal. The second held photographs and a description of an old St. John's home—the Sinclair house. He opened the folder and stared at the top photo. Attached to the corner was a card that simply read: OWNER: JEANNE SINCLAIR, EXETER AVENUE, ST. JOHN'S. The third folder was the most important, but he didn't open it. He knew its contents all too well, so he simply placed it back in the case.

Kevin sat back, took a last gulp of coffee, and looked out the window at the large red brick building across from the hotel. *Steffensen Publishing*. From what he could determine, it had at least four floors and covered atriums on each one. He wondered how much a place like that had cost its owner. He leaned forward, placed his elbows on the table in front of him, and his hands under his chin, his eyes fixed on the building.

Kurt Steffensen. He was curious about the man. He was wealthy. A Newfoundlander. What was it about the man that commanded loyalty from some and disdain from others? What would it take to gain his favour? He assumed that Kurt would be intimidating, but he hoped to portray an air of confidence that would encourage him to be his ally, his way into the Sinclair family—a way to find out about Charles Sinclair, the real purpose of Kevin's mission.

Kevin glanced at his watch. Time to take the first step. Before he

could meet with Kurt, however, he had to find out more about the Sinclair house and, hopefully, anything else about the man he had grown to despise. Charles Sinclair. He picked up the photo again. Purchasing that house would be the greatest challenge of his career and his best acquisition. Despite his feelings for the Sinclairs, he knew that he would have to ingratiate himself to the Sinclair daughter in order to have his offer accepted. It would be an acting job worthy of an award. And he was ready. Surely that would not be such a difficult task.

* * * * *

In her home on Exeter Avenue in the central part of St. John's that morning, Jeanne pulled back the green and blue Waverly drapes and welcomed the brilliant sunshine and clear blue sky after several days of drizzle and thick fog. She toasted an English muffin, buttered it lightly, and poured the juice from two squeezed oranges into a glass. She sat at the small table in front of the bay window overlooking her garden. It was her favourite time of year. Time to plan her garden. Unlike the rest of the country, here the lilac trees were just beginning to bud and tulips and daffodils were still in bloom, testifying to their strength in the midst of uncertain weather. She flipped through the pages of her day planner and noted that her birthday was just a week away, an annual reminder of an age she didn't want to be. She pulled along her notepad and pen while she slowly ate the muffin that she had cut up in tiny pieces on the china plate. She wrote "Call Caroline" at the top and drew a stroke underneath for emphasis. Caroline Kavanagh had phoned earlier and left a message that she was back from her "annual trek to Florida" and wanted to have lunch "to catch up" as soon as possible. She was a long-time friend, but not one that Jeanne could confide in. She had never had that type of friend in her life.

Normally, Jeanne would have accepted her friend's invitation without much thought, but now the prospect left her uncertain. Caroline would soon know the truth about Jeanne's mother, if she didn't already, and in Jeanne's social circle, the truth would make everyone uncomfortable. And Jeanne abhorred discomfort. She mindless-



Trudi (White) Johnson, Ph.D., grew up in St. John's, though her family roots are in Greenspond, Bonavista Bay. She graduated from Memorial University and taught for ten years in the K-12 school system in White Bay and Labrador City. In the 1990s, she completed a doctoral degree in Newfoundland history, specializing in matrimonial law and inheritance practices. Currently, she is an associate professor in the Faculty of Education at Memorial, where she enjoys teaching education and communications and researches effective teaching, student engagement, and teacher efficacy.

Her first novel, *From a Good Home*, was published in 2016. It begins the story about a fictional St. John's family, the Sinclairs. It received positive reviews and was promoted throughout Atlantic Canada. *All Good Intentions*, the second in the series, continues the story of the lives of the Sinclair family and friends. She is currently working on the third book in the series, *Share and Share Alike*. Through her writing, she hopes her readers will see that we all live our lives in "webs spun long before we were born."

In addition to writing fiction, Trudi likes to garden, read murder mysteries, and watch sports. She lives in St. John's with her husband, Albert.

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