GOOD INTENTIONS

Author Q&A

Good Intentions is a dark tale of grief, guilt, and obsession, with a very complicated protagonist whose decisions pose some heavy questions for readers. What inspired you to write this story?

Author Photo credit: Anna Cillan

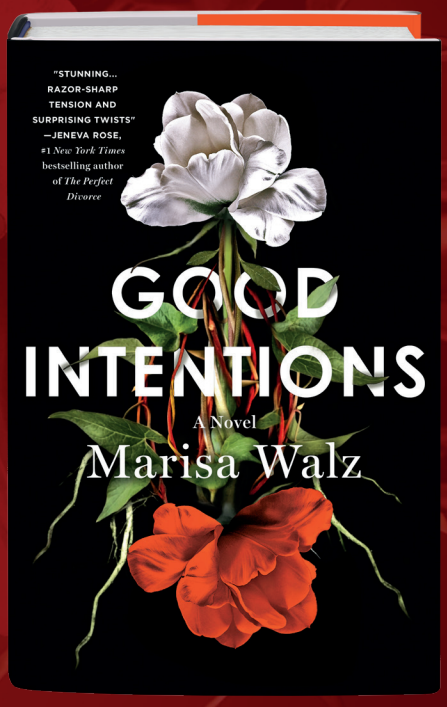
Ah, I wish I could tell you, but it would give away the big twist! What I can tell you is I was inspired by a traumatic experience in college that left me with a lot of big, unanswered questions, chiefly: Can good people do bad things? I think this is why I have such a fascination with morally gray characters. Cady, *Good Intentions*' protagonist, is definitely morally gray—arguably, very dark gray—and clearly an extreme example of what it means to be unhinged. Yet I think most of us, if we're being truly honest, can find kernels of ourselves in Cady. But while I set out to answer whether good people can do bad things, in the end, I don't think I reached a conclusion. And actually, I think that's the point of the most interesting fiction—to raise a question and then let it spark a heated book club discussion.

Luxury event planner is an interesting career choice for a character. Why did you choose this line of work for Cady?

To be honest, I enjoy some frills just for the sake of them. *Good Intentions* is my publishing debut, but there's a proverbial drawer full of unpublished manuscripts at home, and they all have a touch of opulence. I'm not trying to "say" anything about wealth—no "eat the rich" agendas or anything like that. It's just good fun. I'll admit I've occasionally worried that this was some sort of strike against me as a serious writer, but the fact is, I enjoy the juxtaposition of a sparkly exterior with a dark heart. Then a writerly friend pointed out that the glitz and glam in my stories is "part of the spectacle," and I loved that assessment. Now, whenever I question my desire to give my characters a Birkin or a fifty-thousand-dollar bottle of champagne, I remember that it adds to the spectacle and toss it in.

While Cady is clearly the story's protagonist, there are a couple of other leading ladies, including Cady's twin, Dana. Which one was the easiest to write?

I do love Cady. We've spent a lot of time together. And while I like to think I'm significantly less morally ambiguous than Cady, her inner monologue—the overthinking and the snarky observations—came naturally to me. And it was also fun to write Cady's unlikely opposite, Dana. But I think Moira, Cady's grief counselor, was my favorite character to write. She came to me so easily—I started writing her and didn't have to figure anything out. She was just there, in her Reeboks and Radiohead T-shirt, dropping F-bombs and peanut-butter-cup metaphors. I wish all characters were as clear and easy to write as Moira, but I think the secret was that there was less pressure to write her because she wasn't a major character.



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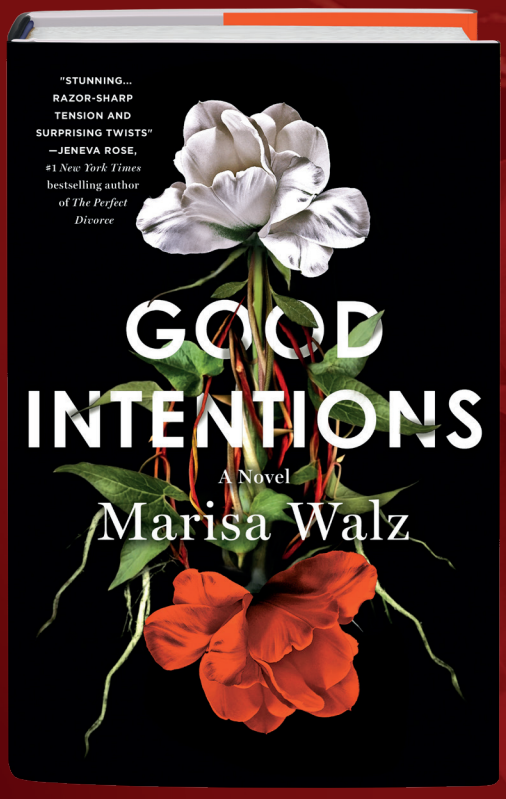
***Good Intentions* is written as a conversation between the narrator, Cady, and her dead twin, Dana. Why did you decide to write the novel in this second person point of view?**

It didn't start out that way. I wrote the first several chapters in first person but quickly felt something was wrong. Cady is not being honest with herself about some very big things throughout this story, so it didn't feel believable that she'd really open up to the reader, or herself—she needed Dana. She's always needed Dana. Dana was her best friend—her only real friend, despite her superficially wide social circle—and so it made sense to me that Cady would turn to Dana even after she was gone. Once I started rewriting the book in second person, with Cady speaking to her dead sister, I immediately knew it was right. There was just this extra level of intimacy and honesty coming through on the page.

Did you always know how *Good Intentions* would end?

Yes. It was actually the third chapter I wrote. I wrote the first chapter, then the second, then the end. Prior to *Good Intentions*, I'd always written very linearly, not going out of sequence at all—I wouldn't have dared to write Chapter 37 until Chapter 36 was tied neatly with a bow. But with Cady's story, I knew where she was starting and I knew where she'd end up, which made it fun to play with all the different ways she could get there. And actually, that experiment opened up a whole new way of writing for me, because the book I wrote after *Good Intentions* was written in no logical order whatsoever. Chapter 1, then Chapter 15, then the ending chapter, then back to Chapter 8 . . . I just wrote whatever scene felt the most clear and compelling to me in that moment. I still had an outline, of course—I'm way too Virgo to not have a plan—but this new method was so freeing. If I wasn't excited about any given chapter, I didn't force myself to write it just because it was the next link in the chain.



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