# House of Good Intentions

*Short synopsis • Naria Khan*

On the day her editor dismisses her, Alexandra Everard learns she has inherited the Willow & Thorn tea rooms in Mendwick. There is barely enough in her purse to get there. Upstairs she finds her aunt Euphemia's china, including a green-rimmed cup that can make fear easier to bear. When Verity Lyle confides that her mother-in-law has betrayed a confidence and then denied it, Alexandra serves her in the green cup. Verity finds the words to write down what happened. She also asked Alexandra what she was drinking, and Alexandra let her think it was ordinary tea.

Looking for accounts of other customers, Alexandra and Ambrose Pettifer find his brother Stephen's name in Euphemia's ledger. Stephen borrowed the black cup when his wife, Harriet, meant to leave him. It made her longing for the man she'd once loved so strong that she agreed to stay. Harriet eventually left, but for years afterwards she doubted her own decisions. Alexandra and Ambrose become lovers before Alexandra admits what she did to Verity. Hurt that she let him tell Harriet's story while keeping her own part quiet, he leaves.

The man who donates coal to the winter fund, Laurence Dacre, has matched the shop's numbered vouchers to private details about the families using them. He threatens to hold back six families' coal unless Alexandra lets him oversee distribution. She refuses and puts her boot money towards replacement sacks. Meanwhile, Dacre has helped arrange a hearing into Alexandra's conduct in hopes of gaining access to the house and its cups. Alexandra tells Verity the truth and returns her private statement. At the hearing, Verity reads her own account. Alexandra admits her deception, and the hearing gives Dacre no authority over the shop.

Dacre has Alexandra abducted and demands the black cup. Ambrose brings it, but when Dacre holds a knife to her throat, he refuses to make her drink. Together they challenge Dacre to try it himself. Warned that it weakens resistance to his own desires, he drinks to prove his self-command. While he boasts, Alexandra slips free, turns the knife aside and kicks it out of reach. Ambrose holds him until the constables arrive.

Once the cups have been examined, Alexandra and Ambrose break them. The shop can stay open, but Alexandra accepts a written reprimand. Dacre is committed for trial. Alexandra publishes what he pledged against what the yards delivered without naming Verity, who returns in April to order plain black tea. She is still angry and might come again. This time Alexandra lets Verity decide. She asks Ambrose to live with her, and he says yes.