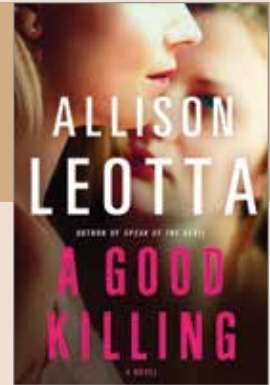


A Good Killing

By Allison Leotta, published by Touchstone, an imprint of Simon & Schuster, Inc. (2105), hardcover, 306 pages, \$25
<http://allisonleotta.com>



Reviewed by John R. Runyan

“Welcome to the defense side of a case,” Jack said wryly. “The first thing any good defense lawyer learns is: Don’t trust anything your client tells you. There are a lot of ways you can figure out what really happened, but asking your client is often the least reliable.”

“I know. But she’s not just my client. She’s my sister. I thought we told each other everything. I went to defend her thinking she was innocent. I believed her when she said she was. But what if she’s not?”

“Sounds like the world might be a better place with the coach gone from it.”

“Don’t look so surprised, Anna. I don’t believe in vigilante justice. But I’ve handled enough cases where the community believes that a murder victim got what he deserved, that their children were safer with him gone. Over and over, I’ve argued that we need a system where citizens don’t take justice into their own hands. Over and over, I’ve heard the response, ‘That man needs a good killing.’” (p 159)

A Good Killing is Allison Leotta’s fourth book. Leotta is the daughter of Alan Harnisch, a member of the State Bar of Michigan, former federal prosecutor, and good friend. Alan called to my attention his daughter’s budding literary career.

Leotta grew up in Michigan, went to Michigan State University and Harvard Law School, and then, following in her father’s footsteps, worked for 12 years as an assistant United States attorney in the Justice Department in Washington, D.C. Leotta concentrated in prosecuting sex crimes—not

normally a federal offense except in the District of Columbia—and then left government service in 2011 after writing her first book to pursue writing full time.

The protagonist in each of Leotta’s books—including a fifth scheduled to be released in May of this year—is Anna Curtis, a federal sex crimes prosecutor in Washington, D.C., who also happens to be a Harvard Law grad. Wisely, Leotta chose to write about what she knows best. Her books reflect not only her intimate knowledge of the nuances of criminal law and procedure—which are second nature to a veteran prosecutor—but also her varied observations and experiences prosecuting those self-indulgent souls who prey on the most vulnerable in our society. The resulting books are rich in painstaking detail about seemingly authentic events and characters, drawing in readers and keeping their attention riveted from the first page to the last.

In *A Good Killing*, the tables are turned, and for the first time in her career, Anna Curtis must represent a defendant in a criminal case. Still smarting from the abrupt cancellation of her engagement and wedding plans, Anna returns to live with her sister, Jody, in Swartz Creek, Michigan. Shortly thereafter, Jody is charged with murdering the married high school football coach in a neighboring community—a local legend for whom Jody has long held a crush—and Anna must come to her defense. The incredible twists and turns of the trial that follows make this Leotta’s best work yet. If her well-written dialogue and incredible eye for detail were not enough to make her worth reading, her masterful and suspenseful plots seal the deal.

Also for the first time, Leotta intersperses her usual third-person narrative with first-person flashbacks told from Jody’s perspective. This is a nice touch, and works particularly well here; the third-person narrative begins with Anna’s arrival back in Swartz Creek long after the murderous events upon which the trial is based. It also helps underscore the significant differences between actual events and the facts as Anna understands them—not an uncommon phenomenon in the life of a lawyer—given Jody’s initial reluctance to share the full truth with her sister.

Leotta’s considerable powers of description are not confined to the courtroom. She is equally comfortable in the bedroom, describing Anna’s sexual encounters (usually only one per book) in remarkably graphic detail. Although Harnisch may not have blushed on first reading, I am not sure I would have been able to say the same if Leotta were my daughter.

Although it may be premature to refer to her as “the female John Grisham,” as the *Providence Journal* has described her, Allison Leotta is equally prolific and well on her way. ■



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