

THE  
JOURNALS  
OF JUNE JEFFERSON



JENNY PHILLIPS

# TABLE OF CONTENTS



Chapter 1 .....	1
Chapter 2 .....	7
Chapter 3 .....	14
Chapter 4 .....	21
Chapter 5 .....	32
Chapter 6 .....	40
Chapter 7 .....	44
Chapter 8 .....	51
Chapter 9 .....	60
Chapter 10 .....	66
Chapter 11 .....	76
Chapter 12 .....	84
Chapter 13 .....	91
Chapter 14 .....	97
Chapter 15 .....	103

# Chapter 1

*Tick. Tick. Tick.*

The ticking of the old wooden clock on the wall felt like the only sound Ida Witherspoon had heard all day. Of course, she had also heard the creak of the floor and the tap of her cane as she walked around the house, the occasional scratch of a chair against the wooden floor as she sat down or stood up, and some dishes clanking as she ate her meals alone.

Exasperated by the incessant ticking of the clock echoing off the walls—a sound which had been going on for years—Ida set down her book, stood up from the couch, hobbled over to the clock, brusquely removed it from the wall, took out the batteries, and stuffed them into her dress pocket, all at remarkable speed for an eighty-year-old woman.

The house fell completely silent.

“Good!” Ida declared with a huff, realizing suddenly that it was the only time she had spoken all day. Hearing a voice in her home felt sadly strange. With a sigh she sank back into the couch again, her chin-length white curls bouncing. She picked

up the book, flipping to the page she had hastily bookmarked in annoyance.

After reading for a little while, Ida set down her book and listened. For a full minute, she sat still, straining her ears for some sound—any sound at all. The silence stretched thickly through the air, and her ears ached in the stillness; there were no sounds at all. *This is even worse than a ticking clock*, she thought. The quiet was heavy and oppressive.

With another huff, Ida pressed herself up from the couch, fished in her pocket for the batteries, shoved them back into the clock, and hung it back up on the wall with a resolute *thud*.

“I guess you’re the only friend I have,” Ida mumbled as the familiar *tick, tick, tick* sang softly from the wall again. With pangs of loneliness that dug sharply into her heart, Ida gently picked up the photo of her late husband on the mantel. “I wish we had decided to have children, Charles,” Ida whispered. “The nice cars, the fancy trips we took—what are they now? You’ve been gone for ten years, and I have nothing but this big house, which is not good company. And there’s not much money left now anyway.”

Ida shook her head and closed her eyes. “I haven’t left the house for two full days,” she declared to the clock. “I’m going to go crazy if I don’t see another person.”

Grabbing her purse, Ida decided that she would go to the grocery store, even though she didn’t need anything in particular; she just needed to talk to a person—to interact with other humans. Driving after dark made her nervous, but the blazing Arizona sun wouldn’t set for a couple of hours yet, so she had plenty of time for the outing.

The quiet drive was almost as lonely as sitting in the house. She passed a few cars and a lone bicyclist on the country road, but no one waved to her. However, the towering saguaro cactuses with their massive arms dotting the landscape for miles seemed almost like old friends to her. They were always there, as were the red-rock cliffs glinting in the early evening sun.

In less than ten minutes, Ida arrived at the store. Placing her cane in the shopping cart, she gripped the cart's thick, glossy handle, moving down the aisles and trying to think of things she could use. Her last trip to the grocery store had been only two days ago. The store was full of people, but Ida still felt . . . alone.

In the produce section, a young woman with short dark hair was thumping a watermelon, and Ida worked up the courage to approach her.

"I've always wondered the best way to choose a good watermelon," Ida said tentatively to the young woman. "Do you look for one that sounds hollow?"

The young woman shrugged. "I think so, but I don't know if that's actually true. Maybe I just do it out of habit."

"Oh, I see," Ida replied, suddenly at a loss for words.

After hefting the watermelon into her cart, the young woman studied the grocery list on her phone as she went on her way.

Ida decided to try the deli counter. She would buy lunch meat in hopes of talking to the nice-looking young man who would slice it for her. Maybe they could converse about the cool weather spell they had been having the past few days. Simply talking about anything to anyone would help soothe the

stinging loneliness pricking her chest. However, the deli worker chatted instead with his coworker as he absentmindedly sliced and packaged her meat selection. He was still talking with his friend as he slapped on a label and handed the thick package to Ida, offering her a friendly nod and smile but nothing more.

Mortified by her complete inability to find another human to speak with, Ida slowly placed her item on the worn conveyor belt at the checkout, dejected, keeping her eyes down and her attention focused on the single item she was purchasing—an item she didn't even want; she disliked deli meat.

“How has your day been?”

Ida looked up, hope rising inside her despite her attempts to suppress it. She searched the cashier's face. The woman scanning groceries looked unhappy and tired and entirely disinterested in Ida—or anyone else, for that matter. She wasn't looking at Ida, and it was obvious to Ida that she hadn't been the one addressing her. Ida then turned around and saw Mrs. Monstead in line directly behind her.

Mrs. Monstead lived up the hill from Ida and had a teenage daughter named Millie—Ida knew that much. Ida and Mrs. Monstead had only exchanged a few words in passing since the Monsteads had moved in a little over a year ago, but Ida had been impressed with the family, especially Millie, from what little she already knew about them. Little did they know that Millie was one of the only bright spots in Ida's long, lonely evenings. From her window, Ida often observed the girl reading in the crook of a certain tree just as the sun was setting, when it was cooler but still too hot to stay out for long. As the light

kissed the horizon, Millie would set her book down, do three cartwheels, pick it up again, and skip inside—every night. The sight of it never failed to stir something happy in Ida’s heart.

A glance down the line told Ida that Millie wasn’t with her mother, and she felt a twinge of disappointment. Ida had never spoken to the girl but often wanted to ask what books she read in that tree that kept her so focused. Beyond that, Ida wanted to know both the girl and her mother—they were her nearest neighbors. But Ida knew she had a reputation for being crotchety. *How does one become friends with their neighbors, anyway?* she sincerely wondered.

“Have you had a good day?” Mrs. Monstead asked, smiling kindly at Ida as she tried again to engage the elderly woman in neighborly small talk.

“Oh . . . it was fine,” Ida replied, noting the cheerless sound of her own voice. She forced a bright smile. “And you?”

“I’ve had a good day, thank you.” Mrs. Monstead glanced into her cart, then chuckled at herself. “Oh! I forgot the toothpaste—the main reason I came.” She waved to Ida absentmindedly as she left the line and returned to the aisles. “I’d better go get it.”

Watching her neighbor go, Ida felt a brief wave of disappointment rush over her. But then gratitude replaced it. *Someone* had noticed her and spoken to her, and a neighbor at that.

A couple of hours later, Ida held a cup of warm peppermint tea as she perched on the edge of her oversized chair, eager to watch the view from the big arched window before her that faced the hill. “There she is,” she said, smiling to herself when

she saw Millie, like clockwork, nestle into the nook of the tree and open her book.

Ida loved this time of day, when the shadows were long and the sky was vibrant with colors that seemed to intensify in the minutes before the sun finally set. She scanned the sky beyond the hill, admiring the shafts of golden light spilling from the pink-tinged clouds. But tonight, a sudden, unexpected movement caught her eye. She glanced back at the tree on the hill just as Millie jumped down and threw her book onto the ground.

Startled, Ida upset her teacup on her plate, splashing tea on her dress. “What’s going on?” she wondered aloud, watching the distant figure stand with her hands on her hips, glaring at the fallen book.

Ignoring the warm tea seeping through her dress onto her knee, she kept her eye on the drama unfolding outside. Ida watched as Millie slowly bent over and retrieved her book, and then, without a cartwheel or fanfare of any kind, headed toward home. The skip in her step was noticeably absent, and Ida watched the girl shuffle her feet, walking slowly with her head down, as if she held the weight of the world on her shoulders.

Ida’s heart was filled with concern. “What’s wrong with Millie?” she wondered aloud.

The only answer came from the clock: *Tick, tick, tick.*

THE  
JOURNALS  
OF *JUNE JEFFERSON*

Fourteen-year-old Millie Monstead's world has turned upside down, dashing her hopes and plans for the future. But her life in the arid Sonoran Desert soon takes a sudden, unexpected turn, catapulted by a simple act of kindness toward a lonely elderly neighbor and the revelations of a mysterious old journal. Join Millie, Ida, and others along the way as they discover a woman who nearly a century before faced a similar challenge and had to make a similar choice: whether to give up or to face the coming darkness with courage and grace.

  
*The*  
**Good** AND THE **Beautiful**  
goodandbeautiful.com



SKU 3521.6