



***On Moonberry Lake*
by Holly Varni**

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 Revell

***Debut Novelist Weaves a Cozy Tale of
Reconciliation and New Beginnings***

“Delightful! Charming! Full of characters who take up residence in your heart. Holly’s stories invite me in with love and laughter. The best of ‘News from Lake Wobegon’ and Father Tim combined.”

—**Lauraine Snelling**, bestselling author of Red River of the North Series

Ada, Mich.—Debut novelist Holly Varni is poised to captivate readers with her heartwarming novel *On Moonberry Lake*. Drawing on her Midwestern upbringing, Varni crafts a tale filled with quirky characters and homespun charm set in the Minnesotan town of Moonberry Lake. Sure to appeal to fans of Jan Karon, Garrison Keillor, Fannie Flagg, and Debbie Macomber, *On Moonberry Lake* will lure readers into an enchanting story of reconciliation, growth, and community to discover how friendships can transform into families and how genuine love can heal even the most brokenhearted.

Cora Matthews life has been turned upside down. She has just broken off her engagement and her mother has died, leaving behind explicit instructions to be buried in the small Minnesota town she grew up in. Cora returns to Moonberry Lake with unresolved questions about her mother’s past and tugging memories from her own childhood that continue to haunt her.

Cora’s “quick” trip to Moonberry Lake is thwarted when she learns that her grandparents’ dilapidated lakeside lodge is her inheritance. But it comes with a surprising stipulation—she must live there for a year. With her life uprooted and nagging questions to answer, Cora resolves to accept the year in Moonberry Lake.

However, challenges abound for Cora, and the disheartening condition of the lodge is only the beginning. The residents of Moonberry Lake present their own set of conundrums, including a cantankerous handywoman, an eccentric artist, a grumpy neighbor, an elderly woman who spends all her time talking to the “residents” in the cemetery, and a very handsome neighbor who always manages to catch Cora at her worst. As Cora seeks to put together the physical and emotional pieces of her past, she must decide if she is also willing to open her heart to a new family and home that is more than she could have ever imagined.

This homespun tale of new friendships, sweet romance, and ordinary miracles will have readers wishing they could spend a summer (or a lifetime) on Moonberry Lake.



About the Author



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Holly Varni is a native Minnesotan of strong Norwegian and Swedish descent, who was raised in the Lutheran Church that Garrison Keillor made a career depicting. Between the lutefisk, grumpy grandparents, and crazy neighbors who mowed their lawn wearing pajamas, the seed to becoming a storyteller was planted in Holly. Though she, her husband, and their three sons live along the Central Coast of California, her beloved Midwest roots continue to haunt everything she writes. She hosts the *Moments from Moonberry Lake* podcast where she shares more stories of her beloved characters.

PRAISE for *On Moonberry Lake*

“Restless and reluctant, Cora Matthews is back in Moonberry where she once happily lived with her grandparents until her mother stole her away. Right from the start, the locals surround Cora and help her reclaim all she’s been missing—love, a sense of belonging, and a heart of peace. An uplifting novel about the power of small-town community.”

—**Suzanne Woods Fisher**, bestselling author of *The Sweet Life*

“Rich characters, a delightful setting, and a heartwarming story. You’ll love everything about *On Moonberry Lake!*”

—**Ginny L. Yttrup**, Christy Award–winning author of *Words*



Sample Interview Questions for Holly Varni *On Moonberry Lake*

Can you please provide a brief summary of your debut novel, *On Moonberry Lake*?

Cora Matthews life is a mess when she returns to the small town of Moonberry Lake located in the North Woods of Minnesota. She's broken off her engagement two weeks before the wedding, her mother has passed away, and she has inherited her grandparents dilapidated lodge. Dark family secrets unfold, a natural disaster threatens to destroy everything she's built, and romantic complications force Cora to choose between forgiveness and a closed heart. What makes up a family is redefined, and *home* isn't quite how she imagined . . . it's better.

What was the inspiration for your story?

My Minnesota upbringing and quirky neighbors collided in a collage of memorable encounters growing up. I was raised in a very close-knit community where everyone's business was everyone's business. I was also surrounded by elderly people who I found fascinating. I was so curious about their life and memorized their most unique characteristics, which always emerge in my writing.

Why did you set your story in a small Minnesotan town?

Growing up in Minnesota, I was enchanted with the natural beauty and change of seasons. Some of my best memories are visiting my grandparents at their cabin on a lake. I love small towns and all the coziness and drama that comes with them.

What are some of the underlying themes in *On Moonberry Lake*?

My intention from the beginning was to show how people do not have to be related by blood to be family. I wanted to remind people of the power of community. I'm not only redefining family but expanding it. And then the themes of grit, perseverance, forgiveness, and being open to difference come into play.

Your protagonist, Cora Matthews, has a lot of unresolved questions surrounding her childhood visits to Moonberry Lake. Without giving any spoilers, can you provide some hints about why Cora and her mother left this small town?

The one thing that separates, frustrates, binds, or breaks everyone is family drama. I don't believe there is anyone who is spared the heartache, disappointments, and work of being in a family. Remaining close to family once you're grown up is dependent on how much effort and commitment you are willing to make. It comes down to one's willingness to not only accept but love individual differences and forgive past mistakes.

The unresolved questions about Cora's childhood visits to Moonberry Lake reflect the outcome of not fighting for reconciliation but stubbornly holding on to grudges and refusing to forgive. Her mother's actions changed the course of Cora's childhood. After Cora learns the truth of her mother's past, it is her turn to decide if she wants to forgive and move on.

What led to Cora’s eventual return to her hometown?

When Cora’s mother passes away unexpectedly, Cora learns that it was her mother’s wish to be buried in the town of Moonberry Lake where she grew up. Cora has vague memories of visiting until she was seven years old, and then for mysterious reasons, her mother refused to ever go back. Cora’s time in Moonberry Lake is extended as she uncovers a family secret.

There are a number of unique characters in this book. Which character was your favorite to write about?

Oh, that is as unfair as asking a mother to pick her favorite child! I love and am fiercely protective of all my characters, but if you ask me which ones are the most fun to write, it would have to be Widgy and Kitty. I don’t write them as much as copy down what they are saying to me as fast as I can. These beloved characters are so real to me; all I try to do is capture and honor their personalities.

What do you hope readers will gain from reading *On Moonberry Lake*?

I hope readers embrace the incredible examples of friendship and community and in some small way reach out to those around them. We live in a time where we are isolated and no longer know our neighbors, which is so sad. My hope is that *On Moonberry Lake* not only reminds readers of how things once were but how they can create a warm and eclectic community of people who are wildly different from them now. It is a reminder that even though we may think we have nothing in common with someone, we all share the need to be loved and have connection.

Can you provide some insight on your writing process?

My writing process is a bit unconventional and wild. Nothing is ever planned or even brainstormed. As crazy as it sounds, I wait for a character to come introduce themselves to me in a dream or while I’m doing something mindless around the house. Once I can see and hear them clearly in my mind, I sit down at the computer and write. The first lines of the book and the first page are my entire anchor. I do not move ahead until I have perfected that. I start at the first sentence and write straight to the end. I don’t skip around the book because I don’t know what’s going to happen. It sounds a bit mad, but my imaginary world leaves me endlessly entertained.

Please discuss your podcast, *Moments from Moonberry Lake*, and how it relates to the novel.

Oh, I have so much fun with the podcast! It is completely fictional and remains in the Moonberry Lake world. All I do is read sections from the town newspaper. The idea was actually birthed out of the pandemic. While everyone was hunkering down at home, I began to write these short commentaries to entertain some friends. We would meet on Zoom and I’d read two or three. They became hooked and began requesting a recording of them so I wouldn’t have to keep rereading them. I only began the podcast because I started getting calls at night with someone asking, “Can you read me ‘A Moment with Martha’?” Hearing the thoughts and wisdom from this elderly character helped distract them from the chaos in the world.

A surprising element that I didn't take into account was how many people would love hearing me read the newspaper clippings. I've been told by countless listeners how my voice has a calming effect on them, which I get a kick out of. My only intention for the podcast is to bring a smile to someone's day.

What are you working on next?

My second book set in Moonberry Lake is scheduled to come out Fall 2024. Readers will get to meet some more side characters who live in town. The second book introduces Delphinium Hayes, who owns the flower shop on Main Street. There was a snippet about her in *On Moonberry Lake*, but now readers will get to know her and her crazy life. The book is filled with love, laughter, and flowers.

Between the unique and mysterious ability Delphinium possesses, hilarious shenanigans from a group of elders, and an unexpected love story, readers will not be disappointed in another mix of the most quirky and endearing characters.

Where can readers purchase a copy of *On Moonberry Lake*?

Everywhere! They can buy it online through Amazon or Barnes & Noble. But I hope readers will go into local bookstores and, if it's not there, order a copy and ask them to carry it.

How can readers connect with you?

I would love for my readers to connect with me through my website, HollyVarni.com, or through Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

GUEST: Holly Varni, author

BOOK: *On Moonberry Lake* (available September 2023, Revell)
