



## Wildwood

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Dundurn (Mar 20, 2018)

Softcover \$19.99 (328pp)

978-1-4597-4020-4

*This is a romance, but it's a romance about solitude and healing and making a home.*

It's perfect timing when Arizona-born Molly Bannister learns that she's inheriting Wildwood, a farm in Juniper, Alberta, the land of the nine-month winter. One hitch: the off-the grid farmhouse will be hers only after she and her daughter rough it there for a year. Broke and rootless, Molly accepts the challenge.

Juniper offers a small cast of hardy and colorful characters who pitch in to help Molly survive a harsh northern winter. The pacing of the book mirrors that of long farm days: steady, and punctuated by an occasional surprise. A quiet, sad Cree teenager, Wynona, and a handsome farmer, Colin McKay, add heart to the tiny community.

This is a romance, but it's a romance about solitude and healing and making a home. Molly learns to love Wildwood, and comes to terms with tragedies in her past. She also gets to know and love her spirited great aunt through her diary, which accounts for her own rough first year homesteading.

Present-day Molly's story starts out as a blank slate, but her departed aunt helps her along. The two women's stories are presented so that their struggles run side by side, and the fun-to-read diary reflections awaken something strong in Great Aunt Molly's namesake.

The journals have appeal beyond the companionship they offer Molly on long, lonely days; they also provide deft historical context and an impetus for character growth. The orphaned present-day Molly craved relatives; the diary gives those to her.

Evident research makes it easy to forget this is a work of fiction. *Wildwood* is enriched by its journalistic details, as with attention given to the ingredients in the baked goods that Molly learns to make in her great aunt's cookstove. Such descriptions are both practical and cozy.

*Wildwood* artfully melds the past and present for a story about homesteading. Likable characters deal with realistic, hair-raising scares and find hard-earned rewards in the wilderness.

MEREDITH GRAHL COUNTS (January/February 2018)

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